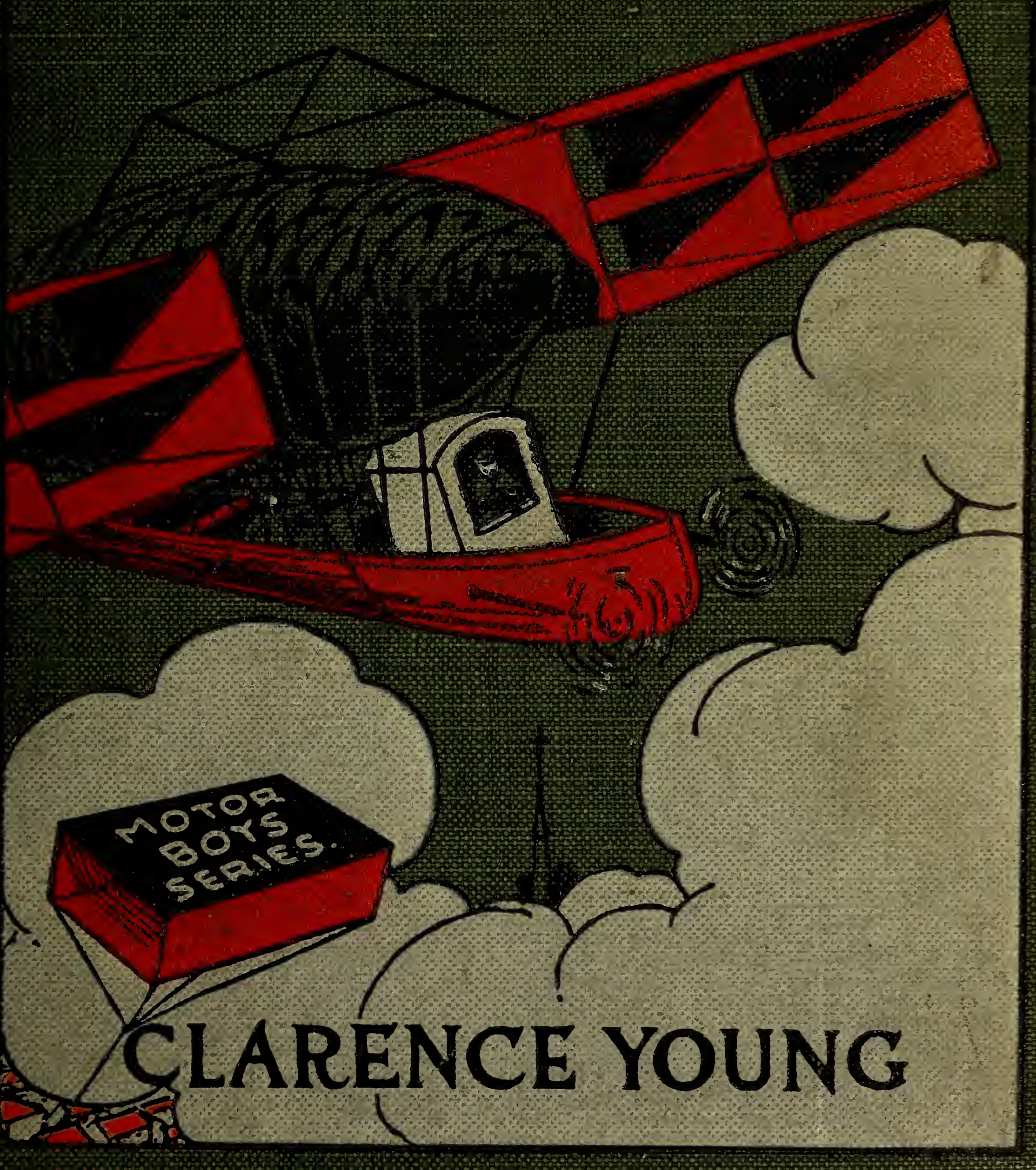
THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS


MOTOR
BOYS
SERIES.

CLARENCE YOUNG

INSTITUTE OF THE AERONAUTICAL SCIENCES

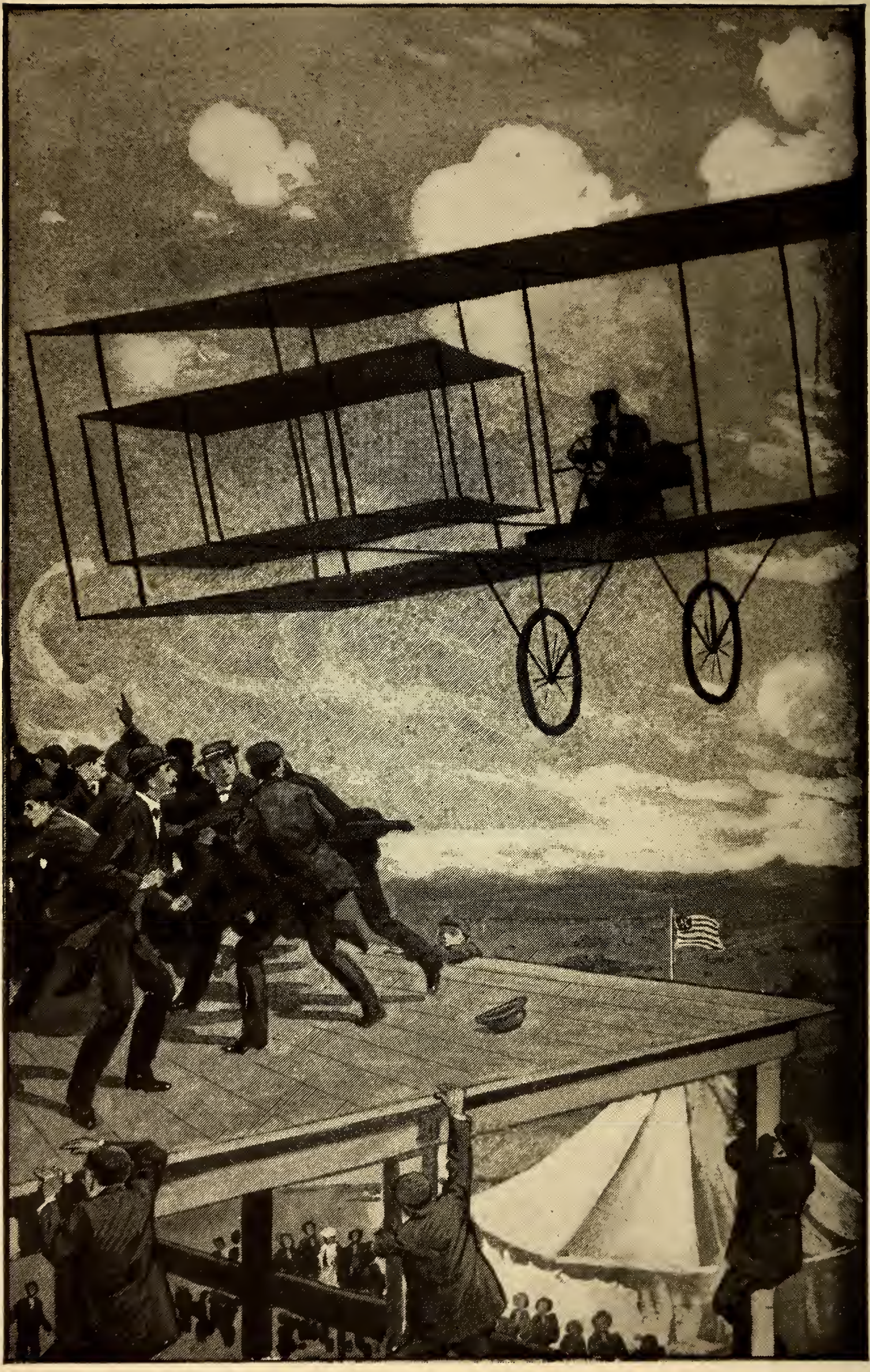
The

OTTO E. KOLLSMAN COLLECTION

of the

Aeronautical Archives

Irene A. Corbally
August, 1911.



"THE AEROPLANE WAS NOW WITHIN TEN FEET OF THE PLATFORM."
—*Page* 66.

THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS

Or

A Trip for Fame and Fortune

BY

CLARENCE YOUNG

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR BOYS," "THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND,"
"THE MOTOR BOYS AFLOAT," "JACK RANGER'S SCHOOLDAYS,"
"JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
CUPPLES & LEON COMPANY

INSTITUTE OF THE AERONAUTICAL SCIENCES
1932

BOOKS BY CLARENCE YOUNG

THE MOTOR BOYS SERIES

(Trade Mark, Reg. U. S. Patent Office.)

12mo. Illustrated
Price per volume, 60 cents, postpaid

THE MOTOR BOYS
Or Chums Through Thick and Thin
THE MOTOR BOYS OVERLAND
Or A Long Trip for Fun and Fortune
THE MOTOR BOYS IN MEXICO
Or The Secret of the Buried City
THE MOTOR BOYS ACROSS THE PLAINS
Or The Hermit of Lost Lake
THE MOTOR BOYS AFLOAT
Or The Stirring Cruise of the Dartaway
THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE ATLANTIC
Or The Mystery of the Lighthouse
THE MOTOR BOYS IN STRANGE WATERS
Or Lost in a Floating Forest
THE MOTOR BOYS ON THE PACIFIC
Or The Young Derelict Hunters
THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS
Or A Trip for Fame and Fortune

THE JACK RANGER SERIES

12mo. Finely Illustrated
Price per volume, $1.00, postpaid

JACK RANGER'S SCHOOLDAYS
Or The Rivals of Washington Hall
JACK RANGER'S WESTERN TRIP
Or From Boarding School to Ranch and Range
JACK RANGER'S SCHOOL VICTORIES
Or Track, Gridiron and Diamond
JACK RANGER'S OCEAN CRUISE
Or The Wreck of the Polly Ann
JACK RANGER'S GUN CLUB
Or From Schoolroom to Camp and Trail

Copyright, 1910, by
Cupples & Leon Company

The Motor Boys in the Clouds

PS
3547
O454M678
1910X
NASMRB

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE
I Noddy Nixon's Tin Fly.................. 1
II Off to the Carnival.......... 11
III Amid the Airships..................... 19
IV The Fat Man's Wager........... 29
V A Disastrous Flight..................... 39
VI Noddy in a Row............... 47
VII In Great Peril.......................... 54
VIII The Dirigible Balloons.. 66
IX A Race in the Air...................... 74
X Planning a Motor Ship................. 81
XI Building the Comet..................... 87
XII Noddy Makes Trouble.................. 96
XIII Joffy Sees a "Ghost"................... 105
XIV Professor Snodgrass on Hand........... 113
XV The Motor Ship Sails.................. 121
XVI Noddy's Plot.............................. 130
XVII A Successful Flight...................... 141
XVIII A Perilous Trip........................... 150
XIX Starting for the Race................... 159
XX Held Up...................................166
XXI Searching for Evidence................. 175

7924

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

XXII NODDY IS TRAPPED.......................... 184

XXIII THE STOLEN LEVER.................... ... 190

XXIV "THEY'RE OFF!"............................ 198

XXV NODDY GETS HIS DESERTS........... ... 208

XXVI IN A HEAVY STORM....................... 214

XXVII AFTER A STRANGE BIRD.................. 222

XXVIII THE RED BALLOON......................... 228

XXIX OVER THE MISSISSIPPI.. 235

XXX WINNING THE PRIZES—CONCLUSION..... 240

PREFACE

DEAR BOYS:

In this, the ninth of the books in the "Motor Boys Series," Jerry, Ned and Bob decide that as they have had a number of adventures on land and water, the only place left for them to see sights is up in the air, above the clouds. At first this plan was considered rather dubious, as, though considerable progress has been made toward men sailing about in the upper regions by means of dirigible balloons or aeroplanes, the science is still far from perfected.

But when the boys had attended an aero carnival, and witnessed the flight of a large dirigible balloon, they decided there was nothing for them to do but to attempt a trip that way themselves.

They formed the acquaintance of a veteran balloon constructor, who had a plan for a novel motor ship. This combined a dirigible balloon and an aeroplane, and after some consideration the boys furnished him the money to build one.

All was not smooth sailing, literally as well as figuratively speaking. They had a number of difficulties, not the least of which were caused by their old enemy, Noddy Nixon. How they finally started, the accidents that befell them, and the long trip they made for fame, and not a little fortune, in the shape of a substantial prize, you will find set down in the succeeding pages.

The welcome you boys have accorded the previous books in this series makes me hope that you will also like this one. The conquest of the air is coming nearer every year, and who knows but that the Motor Boys may be the ones who will be among the first to solve it.

Yours cordially,

CLARENCE YOUNG.

THE MOTOR BOYS IN THE CLOUDS

CHAPTER I

NODDY NIXON'S TIN FLY

"HELLO, Ned! Say, Jerry, have you heard the news?"

"What news, Chunky?"

"Why, about the carnival. It's going to be great. I thought sure you'd heard about it. Why, there's going to be——"

"Look here, Bob Baker," remarked Jerry Hopkins, rolling over in the grass, where he was stretched out under a big maple tree, "do you know it's about ninety in the shade to-day?"

"Sure I know it," replied Bob, breathing rather quickly, for he was quite stout, as his nickname of "Chunky" implied;, and he had hurried from his house to see his two chums, Jerry Hopkins and Ned Slade.

"Well, then, if you're aware of that interesting and very evident fact, why do you come around here, puffing like a steam engine, and making all sorts of a row, while Ned and I are trying to keep cool and improve our minds?" asked Jerry, pretending to be angry. "Why do you do it, I ask?"

"I thought you'd be anxious to hear the news."

"What news?"

"Oh, don't bother, Chunky," put in Ned, stretching and yawning. "The best news you could tell us now would be that there was a freezer full of ice cream somewhere within easy reach. If you're not ready to tell us something like that, why, take a stretch down here in the shade, and don't puff so. You make me warm."

"Well, say, if you don't want to hear this, all right," replied Bob, a little put out at the manner in which his announcement had been received.

"Oh, don't bother with him, Chunky," yawned Jerry. "If you have any news to tell, let it go. I'm listening. What's it about? Has our gold mine failed, or has Professor Snodgrass discovered some new species of man-eating hoptoad?"

"It's got nothing to do with Professor Snodgrass, or our gold mine, either," responded Bob. "But there's going to be a great carnival at Broadlands, and I thought maybe——"

DSI

"Carnival? You mean a county fair, I suppose," interrupted Ned. "Excuse me. I can see all the cattle and mowing machines I want right here at home."

"I guess your dad must have made you mow the front lawn this morning, eh, Ned?" inquired Jerry with a grin.

"That's what he did, and it's no front parlor of a lawn, either. I don't ever want to see a lawn-mower again. But here comes Bob, all excited over a county fair, where all they have to eat is frankfurters, popcorn and ice cream cones."

"Oh, is that so?" retorted the stout youth rather indignantly. "Well, if you're so smart, did you ever hear of a county fair in July, before the crops are in?"

"He's got you there, Ned," said Jerry.

"Well, what kind of a carnival is it?" asked the youth who had endeavored to discount Bob's news. "Why don't you tell us your story, instead of hemming and hawing around here, like an automobile that's run out of gasolene and has a spark-plug that's gone on the fritz? Why don't you, eh?"

"I will, if you'll give me a chance. There's going to be a carnival over at Broadlands and——"

"You said that once before," reminded Ned.

"Go ahead, don't mind him," advised Jerry.

"It's going to be a balloon and aeroplane carnival," went on Chunky. "All sorts of airships are to be exhibited, and there are going to be races. It's going to be great! They're just putting up the posters all around town."

"Is that straight?" asked Ned, for Bob was sometimes inclined to joke.

"Sure it is. Come on and I'll show you the posters. There's one on our side fence. I let the man stick it there."

"And maybe your dad will make you take it off," said Jerry.

"I don't care. I wanted to have a chance to read it. But this carnival is going to be all right. As soon as I heard of it I ran to find you two fellows. Why can't we go and take it in? It's only about seventy-five miles to Broadlands. There are good roads, and we can go in our auto."

"That's the stuff! When is it?" asked Jerry.

"Next week. It lasts six days."

"If it's as hot as this the gas balloons will explode with the heat," predicted Ned.

"Oh, it'll cool off before then," declared Jerry. "But what else, Bob? Did you look to see who any of the entries were by? Are the Wright brothers going to compete? Will Zeppelin send his big, long aluminum balloon over from Germany? Captain Baldwin ought to be on hand, anyhow."

"I didn't notice any of those names. I don't believe any of those big inventors will be on hand, but I can tell you one person who's going to have an entry."

Bob's manner was so earnest, and he seemed so worked up over his news, that both Ned and Jerry lost their half-bantering air, and began to be seriously interested.

"Who is it?" inquired Jerry.

"Noddy Nixon."

"What? Noddy? That chump going to exhibit an airship?"

"I don't know that it's exactly an airship," answered Bob. "But it's some sort of a machine for sailing above the earth, or it wouldn't be allowed at the carnival."

"But Noddy Nixon, of all the fellows in the world!" commented Jerry.

"It does seem sort of queer," admitted Bob. "That's what drew my attention to the posters. I saw Noddy's name on them."

"Is his name on the posters?" chorused his two companions.

"Sure. He's one of the entrants; I believe that's the proper word," said Bob, grinning. "His machine is called the *Firefly*."

"Does he expect to sail it himself?"

"What sort of a shebang is it?"

"Why didn't you tell us before?"

"Queer we didn't hear anything about it. He must have been keeping it quiet."

"Where did he get the gumption to invent it?"

These, and other questions and comments, Bob's two chums asked of him so quickly that he had no chance to reply.

"That's all I know about it," he said, when Ned and Jerry had to stop to get their breaths. "What's the matter with taking a run over to Broadlands and finding out more about it? Maybe we could get up a machine ourselves."

"Not if the carnival takes place next week," replied Jerry, though there was a new look on his face—a look which his companions knew indicated that he was thinking deeply. Indeed, Bob's news had created quite an impression on Jerry, and in a measure it was responsible for a series of strange happenings which took place after that, and in which the motor boys played conspicuous parts.

"And is that all you can tell us?" asked Ned. "What sort of a machine has Noddy?"

The interest of Ned and his two companions, in what Noddy was about to take part in, was not lessened by the fact that young Nixon, the town bully, was their enemy, and, in the past, had done much to annoy and injure them, though, usually, his mean schemes went for naught, because of the bravery and activity of the three boys against whom he had a grudge.

"That's all I know—what the posters said," replied Ned. "His name is only one of about twenty, I guess. There are pictures of all sorts of airships, but I didn't see any that looked like a firefly."

"Queer," murmured Jerry. "I wonder what sort of a machine Noddy has?"

"I can tell you," exclaimed a voice behind the motor boys. "It's great—regular fly—tin wings—flop up and down—faster than you can count—whoop! there they go—up goes the machine—down again—round in a circle—flip-flap-flop! Start the motor—twist the rudder—look out—here she comes—that's the way!"

And the speaker, a small youth, very much excited, had to stop, for he was out of breath, so rapidly had he talked.

"Oh, it's Andy Rush. No need to turn around to tell that, boys," remarked Jerry, stretching out in the grass again. "Well, Andy, aren't some of your cylinders hot after that sprint?"

"I guess so—I don't know—heard you talking about Noddy Nixon—his airship—thought you wouldn't mind—I came up closer—I heard about it—I've seen it—it's great—say——"

"Have an ice-cream soda," interrupted Ned, pretending to hand one to the excited little fellow.

"Aw, quit," begged Andy reproachfully.

"That's right, let him tell us about it," suggested Jerry. "Now just shut off a little of your gasolene, retard your spark a bit, and you'll do better. How did you come to know about Noddy's machine?"

"Because he wanted me to try a flight in it. He needs some one who is light, and he asked me. But I wouldn't do it. I'm afraid," answered Andy Rush.

"Did you see it?" asked Ned eagerly.

"Sure. He had it built in Jenkinson's machine shop. But he's been keeping quiet about it. I guess he didn't want you fellows to get on to it, for fear you'd beat him out. He's been working on it for some time. Ever since he heard about the carnival."

Andy was speaking more quietly now, and his three auditors listened intently.

"And is it really shaped like a fly?" asked Jerry.

"It sure is. He took me over and showed it to me yesterday. That's when he wanted me to sail it for him. It's a big tin fly, with wings and everything. Oh, it's a queer-looking shebang. It's big, too."

"How does it run?" asked Bob.

"He's got a little motor on it, one he took out of his old auto, I guess. It makes the wings flap up and down."

"And he really thinks he can fly in it?" asked Ned.

"He's sure of it," replied Andy. "He told me how many flaps the wings made every second, but I've forgotten."

"What does he expect will make the machine rise in the air?" asked Jerry. "Has he aeroplanes or a balloon attached to it?"

"Nope. Nothing but a sort of car, shaped like a fly's body, and two wings on each side, with a tail in back like that of a fish. He says the flopping of the wings will make it rise up, same as a bird flies."

"Well, if that isn't the limit!" exclaimed Jerry. "He must be crazy. It is a heavy machine, Andy?"

"Sure. It takes four men to lift it."

"And he expects to make it rise up by vibrating tin wings," went on Jerry. "Well, he is a chump!"

"I am, eh? Well, maybe when you see me sailing along through the air you won't be so fresh!" exclaimed a new voice, and the four boys, looking up, saw Noddy Nixon, their enemy, standing not far away. He had come up through the fields back of Jerry Hopkins' house, where the chums were resting in the shade of a little grove, and he had overheard the closing sentences of their conversation.

"I'm a chump, am I?" he went on angrily. "Well, I've gotten the best of you more than once, Jerry Hopkins, and I'll do it again. The *Firefly* will fly, and I know it, and if you slander me or my machine any more I'll sue you for damages. I'll fix you, Andy Rush, for giving my secrets away!" and with an angry look on his mean, crafty face, Noddy Nixon advanced toward the little fellow.

CHAPTER II

OFF TO THE CARNIVAL

Andy Rush well knew Noddy's character, and he had no notion of remaining to be chastised by the bully. He leaped to his feet and started to run, Noddy taking after him. Andy fell on a slippery patch of dried grass, and Noddy was almost upon him when Jerry ran up.

"That'll do you," he said. "Let Andy alone."

"I will not."

"Yes, you will."

"No, I won't.

"I'll punch your head if you touch him."

Noddy knew Jerry was as good as his word, and as the bully had, more than once, felt Jerry's fists, he backed off.

"He hasn't got any right to make fun of my machine," he muttered.

"He wasn't making fun of it," replied Jerry. "I was laughing at the idea of you expecting to sail through the air with a machine so heavy it takes four men to lift it, especially when you haven't any lifting power."

"Oh, I s'pose you know a lot about airships?" sneered Noddy.

"I know enough about 'em to know that a machine heavier than air can't rise unless there's something to give it a lift."

"Aw, you think you're awful smart. But you wait. When you see me sailing around at the carnival you'll sing a different tune."

"Maybe," admitted Jerry good-naturedly. "I hope you do fly, Noddy, and don't break your neck."

"I—I didn't know you didn't want me to tell about the *Firefly,* Noddy," remarked Andy, peering out from around Jerry's stocky form.

"Yes, you did, and I'll fix you the first chance I get. You wait."

"Andy, if he bothers you just let me know," spoke Jerry significantly. "Don't let him worry you. If you attempt to injure Andy for what he said to-day you'll have to reckon with us, and you can put that in your gasolene engine and use it for fish bait," added Jerry, looking at the bully.

"Aw, you think you're smart," was Noddy's half-growled retort. "But I'll show folks what I can do. You'll wish you had a machine like mine when you see how it works. You're jealous, that's all. You're mad because you haven't got an airship."

"Sure we are, Noddy," answered Bob with a smile. "But we're going to have one."

Bob's companions looked at him in some wonder.

"We're going to make one with our motor boat that was smashed, and use some old auto tires, filled with gas, to raise us. Then we'll have a race with your *Firefly,"* went on Bob with a cheerful grin. "Ta-ta! Here's your hat, what's your hurry?" and he slumped down on the grass, selecting the most shady spot he could find, for it was quite hot, and the sun was strong.

"That's all right—I'll show you," murmured Noddy as he turned away.

"Humph!" exclaimed Jerry, when the bully had passed out of sight. "Talk about trolley cars and you'll hear the fare register. But say, fellows, this airship business has set me to thinking. We'll have to take in the carnival."

"We sure will," agreed Ned. "Let's go and see that poster Bob was talking about."

"It's too hot," declared Bob. "I can tell you all that's on it. Besides, the fellow who was putting it up gave me some circulars."

"Well, why didn't you say so at first?" demanded Jerry. "Pass 'em over and I'll take a squint at 'em."

Bob pulled some papers from his pocket and handed them over to Ned and Jerry, who were soon deeply interested in the somewhat extravagant statements advertising the carnival.

While they are thus engaged it will be a good opportunity to tell you a little something about them, where they lived and how they came to be known as the "motor boys."

Bob Baker was the son of Andrew Baker, a wealthy banker, while Ned Slade's father kept the largest department store in Cresville, and was counted well off. Jerry was the only son of Mrs. Julia Hopkins, a widow, and she had a comfortable income from wise investments made by her husband.

The three boys, who lived in the New England town of Cresville, not far from Boston, had been chums as long as they could remember.

Their early adventures were told of in the first book of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys."

They gained the name from the fact that they took part in bicycle races, one of them winning a motor cycle. Later all three acquired those speedy machines, and it was not long before they owned an automobile.

In that they made a long trip overland, and later went into Mexico, where, in company with Professor Uriah Snodgrass, a noted scientist, engaged in making a collection of curious bugs and animals, they discovered a buried city. They returned home from Mexico across the plains, and, shortly after that, using some of the funds from their interest in a gold mine they discovered, they purchased a motor boat.

In that boat, named the *Dartaway,* they had stirring times, as told in the fifth volume of this series, entitled "The Motor Boys Afloat." Following their adventures around home they made a long trip on the Atlantic, and from there they went into the strange waters of the Florida everglades. Their experiences there were fully equaled by a trip they next made on the Pacific, searching for a mysterious derelict, though they had to make this voyage in a motor boat they hired by the season, as their own was smashed in a railroad wreck as it was being sent home from Florida.

They had returned from California in time to resume their studies at the Cresville Academy, and they had put in a full winter at their books. They had just successfully passed their examinations, and when this story opens, early in July, were still undecided what to do during the long vacation.

It was while Ned was paying a visit to Jerry, under the trees near that lad's house, that Bob came along with the news of the carnival, with what result you have just been made acquainted.

The boys eagerly perused the hand-bills and circulars which Bob gave them. Even Andy Rush was so interested that he forgot to talk, which was the occupation the little fellow was at most of the time, when he was not asleep or eating.

"Well, what about it, fellows?" asked Bob, as he saw Ned and Jerry thoughtfully folding up the circulars.

"It's great," was Jerry's comment. "We've got to take it in, Ned."

"That's what I say. We were just wishing we had something to do, and along comes Chunky——"

"Oh, I knew you'd be interested as soon as I saw that poster," interrupted the stout lad.

"It's too bad that we let Noddy get ahead of us, though," continued Jerry.

"Can't we make some kind of an airship?" asked Bob. "All it needs is some wings and a motor. We can take the one from the auto. It's almost new, and it has six cylinders," for they had

had a new engine put in their car, and the machine had otherwise been brought up to date.

"I guess it needs more than an engine to make a motor ship," said Jerry.

"Motor ship! That's a new one," commented Ned. "But it's a good name. I wish we had a motor ship."

"Maybe we will have—some day," remarked Jerry with that serious, thoughtful look still on his face. "But it's too late to think of one for this carnival. However, we can take the show in. We may get some new ideas. Let's see—to-day is Tuesday. It opens next Monday. We'll arrange to go in our auto, and stay the whole week. Can you fellows manage it?"

"Sure," replied Bob, who knew his parents would not object.

"I'll go along," added Ned. "I was just wishing we could have some kind of an outing. I was thinking of Florida again."

"And the Seabury girls, of course," added Jerry with a laugh.

"Well, I would like to see them. I guess——"

"I guess one would do you—Miss Olivia," went on Jerry. "How about it, Ned?"

"Aw, cut it out," and Ned blushed.

"Well, that's settled. We'll go to the aero carnival," declared Bob, fearful, perhaps, lest Jerry should twit him about Miss Rose Seabury, one of three sisters whose acquaintance they had made while in Florida.

Little Andy Rush glanced from one to the other of the three motor boys. There was a wistful look on his face.

"Would you like to go along, Andy?" asked Jerry, guessing the meaning of the small chap's gaze.

"Would I? Say—would I eat ice cream? Think of it! Airships—above the clouds—balloons—motors bang-bang! up in the air—down to the ground—whoop de deedle-de! over the fence is out—try again—blow up the gas bag—start over—there they go—a race in the sky—O la-la! Whoop!"

"There, I guess you'd like to go, all right. Now cool down, or you might crack a cylinder," advised Jerry. "Go ask your folks, Andy, and see us later."

Andy found that he could go, and the following Saturday the three motor boys, with their small guest, started from Cresville in their auto. They intended to put up at a hotel in Broadlands, and remain a week at the carnival.

CHAPTER III

AMID THE AIRSHIPS

"SAY, it's quite an affair, isn't it?" said Jerry, when, late that Saturday night, they rode past the grounds where the airship exhibition was to take place. The boys were on their way to the hotel, where they had engaged rooms in advance, a necessary precaution, as such a crowd flocked to Broadlands that the accommodations of the place were stretched to the utmost.

"I guess it's going to be a first-rate show," commented Ned. "I thought it might be a fake from the way the handbills read."

"Oh, it's the real thing, all right," declared Bob. "An organization of wealthy men is back of it, I heard dad say, and they've got some real good machines here. They're going to give prizes, too."

"I don't see any airships flying around," objected Andy, who, as Jerry halted the machine outside of the grounds, was gazing anxiously aloft.

"Of course not," replied Ned. "They aren't going to bring them out before the show opens.

I suppose all of them are not here yet. But there are tents and sheds enough to house half a hundred."

Certainly there were a number of big buildings and tents on the grounds. The buildings were of the flimsiest character, but were all that were needed to shelter dirigible balloons or aeroplanes.

"I wonder where Noddy's *Firefly* is?" asked Bob.

"Did he ship it?" asked Ned.

"Oh, yes, he sent it off, all right," answered Jerry. "I was asking Mr. Hitter, the freight agent at the depot, about it. He said Noddy fussed and fretted for fear it would get broken on the road. It was all taken apart and boxed up, and Noddy threatened to sue the railroad if one piece of his machine was lost or damaged. Mr. Hitter said he nearly bothered the life out of him."

"I'd like to see it," said Ned. "I wonder which tent or shed is his?"

"We'll inquire later," said Jerry. "But first we'd better get to the hotel and see about our rooms. There's such a crowd here they may not reserve them for us if we don't claim them soon."

Indeed, they did not arrive at the hotel any too quickly, for the clerk was about to ignore the reservation they had telegraphed for, and give their rooms to newcomers. The boys, however, secured two nice, large ones, and were soon installed in them with their suitcases, which held their clothing.

"Let's go out to the grounds," proposed Bob, when they had unpacked and enjoyed a good wash, to remove some of the grime and dust of their auto trip.

"I'm with you," said Jerry. "We'll see if we can spot Noddy's *Firefly*."

The four boys got into the auto and were soon at the carnival grounds. The place was open, as it was necessary to have such a large field, for the operations of the balloons and aeroplanes, that it would have been impossible to enclose it with a fence. But though the spectators could freely view the ships of the air when they were in flight, they were prevented from noting them at rest, as every one was under some tent or housed in a temporary building.

The place was somewhat in confusion, as new exhibits were constantly arriving; stand owners, who hoped to sell refreshments, were engaged in putting up the booths; and men with big trucks were driving here and there, with immense boxes on their vehicles.

These last were, evidently, parts of airships and were to be assembled under one of the many tents or other structures that dotted the ground.

Here and there could be seen nervous men, who were anxious for the fate of some weird machine that a careless truckman had agreed to deliver. One such man was admonishing the driver of a big wagon, on which was a large case.

"Now be very careful of that—very careful," the owner was saying. "The least jar will displace some of the delicate springs, and shift the center of gravity, besides disturbing the equilibrium of the centrifugal planes. Careful, now—look out!"

The ground was uneven, and, in driving, the truckman reined his horses into a hollow. The vehicle careened, and the big case was on the verge of falling off.

"Oh! Oh! Catch it! Quick! It will be smashed! The work of ten years will be ruined!" cried the inventor.

He was walking alongside the truck, and he tried to hold the case from sliding off the inclined platform by bracing his hands against it. But it was too heavy for him and continued to move toward the ground.

"Let's help him," suggested Jerry, and with one accord the boys jumped from the auto, which Jerry had stopped, and ran to the aid of the man. They managed to stop the case from sliding off, and by that time the driver had urged his horses to a level place.

"I don't know how to thank you!" exclaimed the inventor to Andy and the motor boys. "If that case had fallen to the ground my airship would have been smashed. I am a thousand times obliged to you. That is my tent over there. Now, be very careful, truckman."

"Aw, sure I'll be careful. But I never see such uneven ground. What sort of an airship is it, anyhow, if a little fall like that will smash it? Sure, what'll yez do when ye falls from the sky? Answer me that."

Clearly he was not a firm believer in the future of airships.

"A fall, no matter from what height, will not matter when my ship is in operation, for the centrifugal planes and the equalizing balances will render any descent harmless," declared the inventor. "Now, continue on, Mr. Truckman, if you please. I am very much obliged to you young gentlemen. Are you exhibiting here? If so I may have a race in the air with you."

"No, we're only here out of curiosity," answered Jerry. "But we are very much interested in airships. What kind is yours?"

"Ah, that's a great secret," replied the inventor with a sly look. "I can't tell you. But I will astonish the crowds Monday by making the most successful flight. I don't mind admitting that my machine is built on the principle of the flying grasshopper. It acquires a start by means of two long shafts, made on the model of the hind legs of a grasshopper. By means of powerful springs my machine is launched into the air, just as a grasshopper leaps forward. Then his wings sustain him, just as the wings, the centrifugal planes and the equalizing weights, will hold up my airship with me on it. I have a great invention. I must go now and put it together. I hope it is not damaged. It is a great risk to bring it here, but I expect to win the grand prize."

"Do you know anything about any other airships that are here?" inquired Ned as the boys started back to their auto.

"Not much. Why?"

"A fellow from our town has one here. He is Noddy Nixon, and he calls his machine the *Firefly*. We wanted to see it."

"The *Firefly?* Oh, yes, I know about it. Young Nixon was telling me about it. He is a smart youth, but his machine will never fly."

"That's what we think," declared Bob.

"No, it will never fly," went on the inventor of the machine built on the plan of a grasshopper. "He has the wrong idea. The wings of his fly are not large enough, and are too heavy. But my machine will work. I am positive of it. Come and see me after my first flight, and I may let you go up. Just ask for Morris Abernot. I will be in this tent here," and he indicated one toward which the truck was slowly being driven.

"Do you know where the *Firefly* is kept?" asked Ned.

"Yes. Right over in that tent with the yellow flag," and Mr. Abernot pointed to a canvas shelter some distance away.

"Let's go over, fellows," proposed Jerry. "I'd like to see what Noddy really has."

"Maybe he'll make trouble," suggested Bob. "He's mad at us."

"Oh, he's always that way," put in Ned. "That's nothing new. I'd like to see the *Firefly*, too. Maybe he isn't there, and we can peep into the tent."

"More likely he's charging admission to see his freak," was Jerry's comment. "That's what some of these fake inventors are doing. They know their machines will never leave the ground, and their only chance to make money is to charge admission. I'll bet that's what Noddy is doing."

They went over to the tent with the yellow flag, threading their way in the auto between rows of booths and new buildings. When they got near enough they saw that the yellow flag bore the initials "N. N." for Noddy Nixon.

"He's doing the thing up in style," remarked Bob. "Let's get out of the car and walk over. It's too rough riding here."

They approached the large tent where the *Firefly* was kept. About it was a curious throng, as, indeed, there was about every place where an airship was housed. On the front of the tent was a large sign reading:

NIXON'S WONDERFUL FIREFLY AIRSHIP.
NONE LIKE IT. ADMISSION 25 CENTS.

"Let's go in," said Jerry. "I've got change. I want to see what Noddy is capable of."

"He's got nerve, asking a quarter," commented Bob. "Most of the places only charge ten cents."

"'None like it,'" remarked Ned. "I guess that's true, all right, unless it's Professor Abernot's grasshopper. Well, let's go in."

They started for the entrance to the tent and purchased four tickets of the man who stood at the flap. Something about the fellow attracted Jerry's attention as he paid over the money.

"It's Bill Berry," he whispered to his chums. "I know him, even if he's shaved off his moustache. I haven't seen him since he tried to wreck the steamer. I wonder how he dare come around here?"

"Maybe the government has given up trying to prosecute him for changing the lanterns in the lighthouse," suggested Bob. "He's in with Noddy again, that's evident. Well, they're a fine team."

Bill Berry was a town ne'er-do-well, who more than once had aided Noddy in his schemes to make trouble for the motor boys. But this time Bill, if indeed it was he at the tent flap, seemed to think the boys would not recognize him, for he betrayed no uneasiness.

The four lads passed into the tent, another man being stationed just inside the entrance to take up their tickets. They handed him the pasteboard slips, and had just taken a glimpse of a curious machine in the center of the canvas enclosure, when they saw Noddy Nixon rushing toward them.

"Get out of here!" cried the bully. "I don't want you in my tent! You can't come here and make fun of my invention!"

"We paid for our admission," said Jerry.

"I don't care if you did! I'm not going to let you in! Get out!"

Noddy drew back his fist to strike Jerry, while the other boys crowded up closer.

CHAPTER IV

THE FAT MAN'S WAGER

For a moment, following Noddy's excited announcement, it looked as if there would be a fight. The bully was very angry, and he probably thought that the motor boys had come into his tent to make fun of him.

"Are you going to get out?" he cried, as Jerry showed no signs of withdrawing, and the other three lads stood their ground.

"I don't think so," replied Jerry.

"Then I'll make you. Bill—Bill—come in here and help me put them out!"

"That was Bill Berry outside," murmured Ned.

A second later Bill came running in.

"Put Jerry Hopkins and his gang out! I don't want them here," said Noddy.

"How are you, Bill? Wrecked any more steamers lately?" asked Jerry quickly, and Bill, who must have fancied that disguising himself by shaving off his moustache was not sufficient, decided that it was better to retreat.

"Get out of here! Clear out!" ordered Noddy, suddenly rushing at the four boys. They did not attempt to strike him, and Noddy knew better than to run the risk of hostilities by delivering any blows. He only pushed and shoved, and, as he was one against four, he was not succeeding very well.

Suddenly Noddy slipped and stumbled, bumping up against a fat woman who just then had entered the tent. She screamed, and there was some confusion in the place, which contained quite a few people.

A man pushed his way through the throng that was gathered about the entrance, some trying to get out of the way of impending trouble, and others seeking to come in. The man wore a badge on his coat.

"What's the row?" he asked quickly. "What's the excitement about?"

"We came in to view this machine, paying our way," said Jerry, for he noticed that the man's badge indicated that he was a member of the aero carnival committee. "The owner of the *Firefly*, Noddy Nixon, refuses to let us see it, after we have paid our money."

"What's that?" asked the committee member sternly. "He won't let you see it? None of that, young man! When you are given an exhibition space on this ground you have to conform to all the rules of the association. Any one who pays admission is entitled to see any machine on the grounds. You can't do any crooked work like that or we'll order you off. This is a genuine exhibition."

"Well, they'll make fun of me—they're enemies of mine, and I don't want 'em here," whined Noddy.

"That makes no difference. You'll not be the first inventor who was laughed at—especially those who build airships. If you can't stand being made fun of you've no business to go into this carnival. Now let me hear of no more disturbances in your tent, or I'll close you up. Of course, you boys can stay. The idea of him trying to prevent you!" and the man looked at Noddy in disgust as he withdrew.

Much crestfallen, Noddy walked into a smaller tent erected within the larger one, and there he nursed his wrath, while Jerry and his chums walked about viewing the *Firefly* from various sides.

It was a curious machine. There was a metal body or car, about as large as a good-sized clothes basket. This contained a seat for the operator and the motor for working the big wings. These latter were made of sheets of tin, riveted to long skeleton frames of iron. The wings, of which there were four, two on a side, were shaped like those of a butterfly. They worked up and down by means of wheels and pistons, operated by the gasolene motor.

There was a tail in the rear, set like that on a fish, and it could be moved from side to side, presumably to steer the machine, by means of cords, levers and pulleys. The whole affair looked quite heavy, for it was all made of metal. Too heavy, indeed, to fly, as many observers commented, yet from what Noddy had said he evidently expected to make it sail through the air, carrying himself or some other venturesome person.

That the *Firefly* was not destined for long flights was evident from the contracted space of the car. There was barely room for the operator and the motor, and no supplies for a long trip could be carried.

"Well," remarked Jerry, when he and his chums had spent some time examining the metal "fly," during which interim Noddy had not shown himself, "well, that's a queer arrangement, sure enough. I want to see it in motion."

"Oh, you'll see it, all right," declared a young man, whom Noddy had evidently hired to help him. "Professor Nixon will make his first flight Monday, the opening of the carnival. Professor Nixon will challenge all the other inventors to a race."

"Get on to that, would you?" whispered Ned to Bob. " 'Professor Nixon!' Why doesn't he change his name?"

"We'll be here to see him fly on Monday," added Jerry. "Come on, fellows; I guess we've seen enough now."

They left the tent, looking curiously as they went out for a sign of Bill Berry. But that individual had evidently gone into hiding, and he was replaced by another unprepossessing chap, who was selling tickets.

It was getting dusk now, and the crowds that had gathered to see the carnival put in shape and the exhibits arranged were beginning to leave.

The boys went back to their hotel, and the next day they took a pleasant auto ride in the suburbs of Broadlands, which was quite a large city. They passed the carnival grounds, and saw that there was little activity on them, few of the exhibitors caring to do any more than was necessary on Sunday.

"They'll not be in very good shape by to-morrow," commented Ned. "Half the things haven't arrived yet, the hotel man told me."

"Well, that's always the way with these affairs," said Jerry. "About the end of the week things will be in better shape. But we'll have a good time, and we may get some ideas that will be of value to us."

"Why, do you expect to have an airship?" asked Bob.

"We might," answered Jerry slowly. "I don't see why we couldn't have one. We made out all right with our auto and our motor boat. What's the matter with having a motor ship next?"

"Wait until we see how Noddy succeeds," suggested Ned.

"Yes, I'm anxious to see him fly, though I know he'll never do it in that contraption," declared Jerry.

The carnival was formally opened the next afternoon, though, as usual with such affairs, not half the exhibits were in place. But addresses were made, the history of aeronautics was rehearsed by several speakers, others made great predictions for the future, and then it was announced by the chairman of the committee in charge that some of the inventors would try out their apparatus.

"One of the first to make an attempt to fly at this carnival will be Professor Nixon," went on the chairman. "In his machine, which he calls the *Firefly,* he will endeavor, so he tells me, to make a complete circuit of the grounds. If you will kindly give your attention to the tent over which is flying the yellow flag you will soon see Professor Nixon and his airship."

The crowd, including the four boys from Cresville, hurried over to Noddy's tent. Now, if Noddy was at all bashful, or fearful that his machine would not work, he did not show it. The front of the tent was pulled to one side, and the curious *Firefly* was revealed. Many thus saw it for the first time.

"Professor Nixon asked me to announce that this machine is entirely his own invention," went on the chairman, "though he was obliged to hire the most of the work done in a machine shop. He will now fly for us."

"As long as he doesn't fly toward us it'll be all right, Professor," said a tall man in the crowd. "I wouldn't want that to fall on me. It must weigh several tons."

There was a laugh at this.

"That'll never fly," was another comment.

"That's a submarine—that ain't an airship," jeered a third.

"Let her go, Professor," called a boy. "Better get a feather bed to fall on, though. When you come down you'll come down hard."

"You people can make all the fun you want," shouted Noddy, as he and some men he had hired began to wheel the *Firefly* out of the tent. "But you'll soon see something that will astonish you."

The flying machine was wheeled out into the open. It rested on a small truck, and Noddy presently busied himself about the motor.

"Go borrow a balloon somewhere, and maybe you'll go up," was a suggestion from a red-haired man.

"You mind your own business!" fired back Noddy.

A fat man waddled through the crowd until he stood in the front rank, close to the machine. The four boys were near him.

"Is that the *Firefly?*" the fat man asked of no one in particular.

"That's what it is. It's my machine," replied Noddy proudly.

"What's it for—plowing?"

"Plowing! This is an airship," answered Noddy indignantly.

"An airship! Good land, that'll never rise one inch off the earth. It's too heavy," declared the fat man.

"Oh, it is, eh?" asked Noddy. "Maybe you know a lot about airships?"

"I do," replied the man quietly. "I've made more than a hundred balloon ascensions, and I tell you that your machine will never fly. What's to make it go up?"

"What makes a fly go up? The wings, of course."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the fat man.

"I'll show you and all the rest of these knockers!" boasted Noddy.

"Not in a thousand years, the way you've got it built," cried the fat man very earnestly. "Look here; I'll wager you a hundred dollars that you don't fly with it."

"I'll take you up!" retorted Noddy, pulling a big roll of bills from his pocket. "I'm going to fly in about ten minutes."

"That's a go!" declared the fat person, pulling some money from his pocket in turn. "Here, will you hold this?" he asked a man next to him, and the man accepted the wager.

"I've made a hundred dollars easy," commented the fleshy one to those near him. "He'll never fly."

"Yes, I will," asserted Noddy. "You watch me."

He continued tinkering with his motor, and at last announced that he was ready.

"Clear the track!" cried some of his helpers. "He has to have a long start. Clear the track! Professor Nixon is going to fly in his wonderful invention."

"He's going to fly toward the ground like a chunk of lead," said the fat man with a laugh.

"All ready?" asked Noddy to his principal assistant.

"All ready, Professor."

"Let her go!" cried Noddy, cranking the motor, which soon began to make a noise like a Gatling gun.

CHAPTER V

A DISASTROUS FLIGHT

"HOLD on there! Hold on!" cried the fat man, as Noddy was about to pull some levers, which, presumably, set the gears in mesh and would make the big tin wings flap, though they were motionless now.

"What's the matter?" asked Noddy angrily, looking up.

"I thought you were going to wager me a hundred dollars that you could fly in that thing?"

"So I am."

"Well, why don't you put up the money? Mine's up."

"I guess I'm good for it," murmured Noddy. "The bet stands. Look out, there, I'm going to make a start now! Clear the way! Look out! Look out everybody!"

He turned a little more gasolene into the motor, and the apparatus banged away louder than ever. The whole machine vibrated.

But something seemed to be the matter. Noddy, who had taken his seat in the small car attached to the machine, was vainly pulling on levers and twisting wheels.

"Something's stuck," he said.

"You're stuck," replied the fat man. "You're stuck for a hundred dollars; that's who's stuck."

"Oh, let up!" exclaimed Noddy as the fat man began to laugh. "Just you wait!"

"We are waiting," cried several in the crowd. "Let her go, Professor Nixon."

"Bring us down one of those clouds," suggested another.

"Yes, and a little cooler atmosphere from above," added a third waggish one.

Noddy was red in the face from his exertions in yanking on various levers. He could not seem to get the motor in gear, though the machine was working away at a fast rate. Finally Noddy called to one of his helpers. The man, who was evidently a machinist, soon located the trouble.

"I told you to pull out that catch before you tried to work the starting lever," he said.

"Guess he doesn't know much about the machine," was the fat man's comment.

"I know more than you, and I'll show you so in a minute, too," declared Noddy savagely.

He pulled on a lever with all his force. There was a grinding of cog-wheels, a sort of cough and wheeze from the motor as it took up the load, and then the big wings began to vibrate slowly up and down.

"There she goes!" cried the crowd in some enthusiasm. "Hurrah! He's off!"

"Well, the wings move, that's sure," admitted Jerry to his chums, "but it's another thing to rise in the air."

Noddy, however, had not yet turned on full power. He did so a moment later, and the motor seemed to redouble the explosions, which, not being muffled, made a terrific din. The wings went up and down faster than ever, so rapidly, in fact, that they looked only like a bright blur.

Then Noddy pulled a rope, which shifted a sort of box-kite arrangement that was mounted on supports above the wings, and, to the surprise of the motor boys and the others in the crowd, the clumsy-looking tin fly began to move forward, slowly at first, but, gathering speed, it skimmed over the ground, moving along on the wheels of the platform on which it rested.

"There he goes! There he goes!" cried the throng. "He's going to fly!"

"Not yet, but soon, maybe," murmured Ned. "Come on, fellows, let's run after him."

They hastened forward, following the crowd which was all about the curious machine.

"Keep back! Give me room! Don't get in the way! Some one may get hurt! Stand back! Keep back!" yelled Noddy, who was much excited.

He turned on more gasolene. The motor was now working so fast that the whole machine seemed ready to fly apart with the violence of the explosions and the vibrations of the tin wings.

"Here I go!" yelled Noddy.

"I thought you'd gone some time ago," remarked the fat man sarcastically. He was puffing and wheezing, as he ran to keep up with the machine. Noddy did not reply. He pulled on another lever, and then something did happen.

The *Firefly* lifted itself off the wheeled platform and fairly lurched forward, rising the least bit into the air, which action was necessary before it could leave the platform.

"Look out! Look out!" cried many voices, and the crowd in front of the curious affair ducked and dodged, separating so as to allow a clear passage for the tin fly.

With the motor firing a regular volley of explosions, and Noddy sitting desperately in his narrow seat, the *Firefly* dashed forward. But if the crowd expected it to sail aloft over their heads they were much disappointed. It continued to lurch forward, and then, whether Noddy pulled the wrong lever or cord, or whether it was the nature of the contrivance, was never clearly established, but it turned squarely about and started back.

"It's afraid! It's scared at the crowd!" yelled the fat man, who seemed delighted at Noddy's discomfiture.

"Look out!" shouted the now excited throng, as the people separated to give the *Firefly* room to do all the queer stunts it desired.

Noddy was now holding on to the framework about him. He seemed to have given up trying to guide the airship, which was more of a "ground ship," for it was now resting upon the earth, and hopping forward, by uncertain jerks, like a tired frog.

"Go up! Go up! Why don't you go up?" panted the fleshy one. "I'm going to win my hundred dollars."

Noddy reached forward to pull another lever. As he did so the *Firefly* swerved to one side, narrowly missing knocking over several persons who had approached too close. Then it swung back again, and next began to hop over the ground in real earnest, the flapping of the broad wings, every time they went up and down, serving to lift it with jerks. But as for flying, one might as well expect a man to lift himself by his own boot-straps.

Straight ahead flopped the *Firefly*, right toward a candy and lemonade stand, which the proprietor had piled high with good things, in anticipation of a brisk trade. The tin wings beat the air, the motor exploded loudly, and the whole affair swayed and trembled.

"Get a balloon!" yelled some one in the crowd.

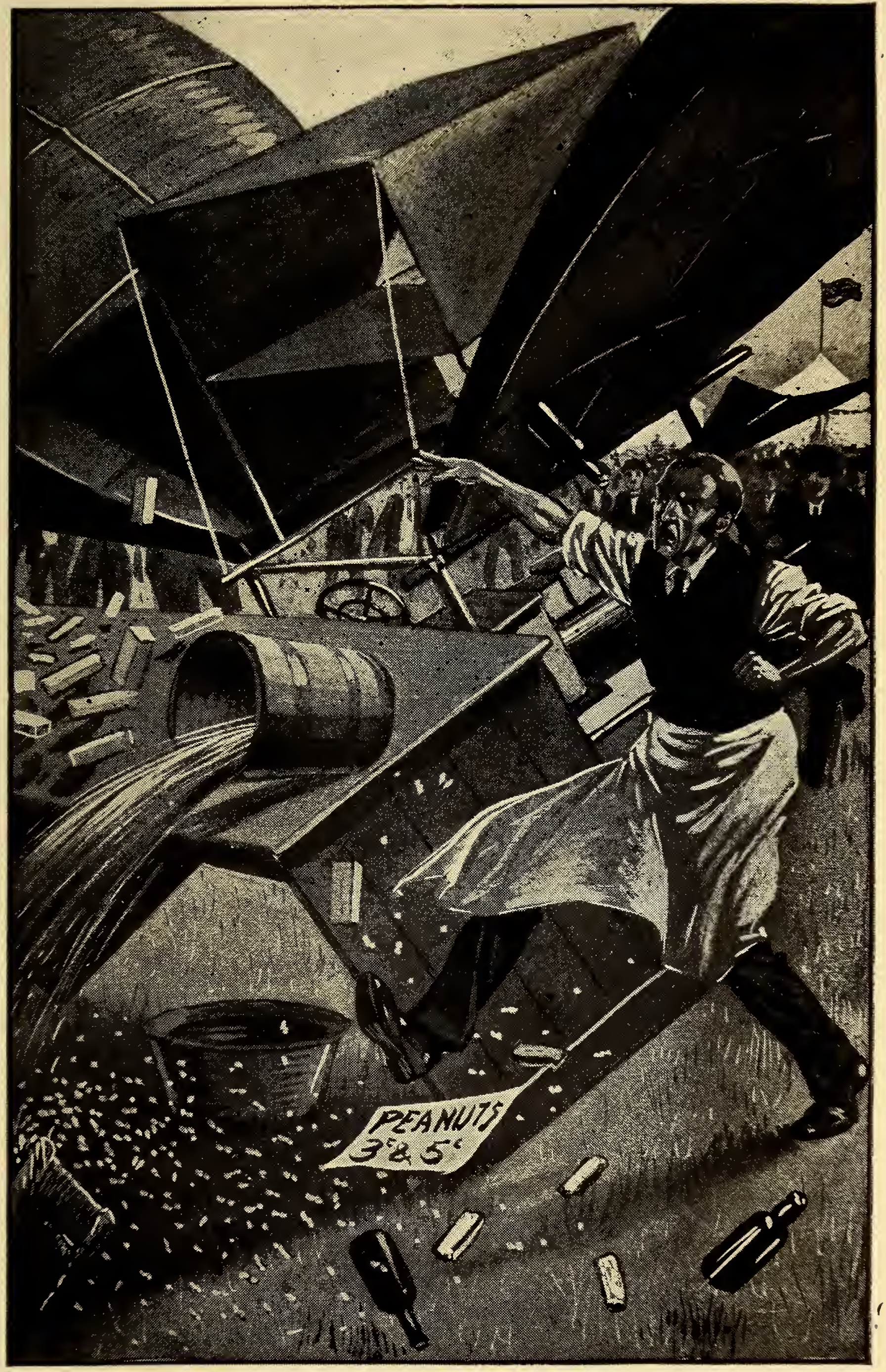
The owner of the stand, who had been too busy fixing up his place to pay much attention to the airship trials, now looked up. He saw coming toward him the tin fly, and he realized his danger and the danger to his stand.

"Here! Here!" he yelled. "Hold on! Stop her! You'll run into me! Stop it, I say!"

"Move your stand! This is the *Firefly* limited, and it mustn't get off the track," said the fat man with a laugh.

Noddy was doing his best to stop the motor, but either he did not pull the right lever, or else the machine had become jammed and could not be stopped. It seemed bent on destroying the stand.

"Jump! jump!" cried several to Noddy, as they saw that he was in danger. He stood up, but



"THERE WAS A RESOUNDING CRASH!"—*Page* 45.

his legs became tangled in some things in the bottom of the car, and he could not extricate himself.

"I—I can't jump!" he shouted back.

"Shut off the motor!" yelled his machinist, pushing his way through the crowd.

"I can't do that either. Something's the matter with it! It won't stop!"

The *Firefly* was approaching nearer and nearer to the lemonade stand. The proprietor was frantically jumping up and down in front of his possessions, as if he could thus ward off the attack of the airship.

"Stop! Stop, I tell you!" he shouted, shaking his fist at the *Firefly*, which every second was coming nearer.

"Look out!" yelled the crowd. "She's going to hit!"

And hit she did a moment later. At the last moment Noddy managed to leap, and he did so only just in time, for there was a resounding crash, a rending and splintering of wood. The lemonade and candy stand seemed to crumple up. One side gave way to admit the pointed prow of the *Firefly*, then the stand seemed to swallow up the airship.

All at once there flew in all directions packages of candy, popcorn and boxes of other confections.

One pail of pink lemonade was tossed high into the air, and, turning over, poured out a crimson flood, which sprinkled the bystanders. Bottles of root-beer and ginger ale mingled with sarsparilla in forming a shower of cooling drinks. There was a hail of peanuts.

The big tin wings, hampered in their movements by the wreck of the stand, came to a stop. But the motor went on. It was now running at full speed, free, and its momentum was terrific. There came several explosions, louder than any that had preceded.

"Look out! She's going to blow up! The gasolene tank will explode!" cried the fat man.

The crowd, which had gathered about the wreck, scattered on the run.

Once more came a loud explosion.

"There she goes!" yelled several.

But there followed only a whistle, a wheeze, and a sort of apologetic cough from the motor. Then, with a gentle sigh, the overworked machine "went dead" and stopped. But oh what a scene of wreck, ruin and desolation!

CHAPTER VI

NODDY IN A ROW

FOLLOWING the noise of the swiftly-running motor, the shouts of the crowd and the crash as the lemonade stand was demolished, there came a period of silence. No one seemed to know what to do or say.

Jerry and his chums watched Noddy pick himself up from a pile of soft dirt, where he had leaped just before his tin fly crashed into the stand. The bully was a sorry-looking sight, his clothes being thickly encrusted with soil, and his hands and face grimy. He staggered forward and gazed at the wreck.

"Well, it didn't fly, and I knew it wouldn't," observed the fat man. "I told you it was too heavy."

"Don't—don't speak to me!" exclaimed Noddy wrathfully.

"Don't speak to you! Well, I like that! I guess I will speak to you long enough to ask you for my hundred dollars. I won it on a fair wager, and I want it. Here," he said to the man who had held his share of the bet, "give me my money. I'm entitled to his, ain't I?"

"You sure are," said several in the crowd who had heard the bargain Noddy had made.

"I wish I'd made him put his money up," went on the fat man. "Come on now, Professor Nixon, or whatever your name is, fork over that hundred dollars. It will come in handy for me. That thing fly! It'll never fly in a hundred years!" and he began to laugh, which further nettled Noddy.

"I'll make it fly yet!" said the bully, gritting his teeth. "Something went wrong with the machinery."

"I should say it did," went on the fat man.

"It'll need a lot of repairs before it will flop its wings again," observed Andy Rush, who was in the front rank of spectators. Noddy heard him, and turned savagely on the little chap.

"You mind your own business!" he exploded. "If I catch you around my machine I'll have you arrested. I believe you sneaked in and monkeyed with it so I couldn't fly. I've a good notion to punch your head."

"Better not try it," advised Jerry quietly. "And you have no right to say Andy did anything to your machine. He was nowhere near it, except when we were with him."

"Well, maybe you had a hand in it," murmured Noddy. "You're jealous of me, that's what you are."

"Here, you drop that kind of talk!" exclaimed Jerry, striding forward. "We know you, Noddy Nixon, and we know your crony, Bill Berry. If you don't keep a civil tongue in your head we'll see that you're put out of this carnival. We never touched your crazy tin fly, and we're not jealous of you. If we couldn't get up a better airship than that we wouldn't have any."

"That ship is all right. All it needs is a little fixing," went on Noddy, taking care to keep well away from Jerry.

"Who owns this thing?" suddenly asked the stand owner, as he came from a silent contemplation of the wreck and ruin and approached the crowd.

"He does!" exclaimed half a dozen persons, pointing at Noddy.

"You did that on purpose! You know you did! I saw you steering straight for my stand," cried the man. "I want damages now—heavy damages! Everything is spoiled, and it cost me fifteen dollars to build the stand, besides all the things I had. I must have damages."

"Oh, dry up!" retorted Noddy, who had had about all he could stand in the way of misfortune.

" 'Dry up,' eh? I'll show you!" cried the man. "Are you going to pay me for my things?"

"It was an accident. I couldn't help it."

"What difference does that make to me? That won't bring back my lemonade. That won't wrap up the popcorn in packages again. That won't mend the broken bottles of ginger ale. I want damages, and I'm going to have 'em."

The man was so insistent, and stood close to Noddy in such a threatening manner, that the bully was alarmed. He shrank back.

"It was an accident," he repeated. "I couldn't help it. Something went wrong with the engine. I'm—I'm sorry."

"A heap of good that does me!" cried the angry stand owner. "I want my things, or I want pay for 'em. I must have fifty dollars, or I'll have you arrested for malicious mischief. I saw you steer your crazy machine right my way. You could easily have flown above me, instead of landing in my stand."

"He couldn't fly—that was the trouble," said the fat man, chuckling. "He couldn't fly. I guess we'll call what's left of his machine the 'flyless-fly,' instead of the *Firefly*. Ha, ha! Ho, ho!"

"I'll—I'll——" spluttered Noddy, but he did not know what to say.

"Well, are you going to pay me damages?" demanded the stand owner. "I want fifty dollars."

"I—I haven't any money here," said Noddy.

"You haven't any money? And yet you made a wager with me for one hundred dollars!" cried the fleshy individual. "I like your nerve! How were you going to pay me, I'd like to know?"

"I didn't think I'd lose," explained Noddy. "I thought I'd fly."

"And where is my fifty dollars coming from?" again demanded the stand owner. "I want it and I'm going to have it. Here the carnival has opened, and I can't do any business until I get a new stand. I ought to soak you a hundred dollars."

"That's right! Make him pay!" cried the throng.

"Look here!" exclaimed Noddy angrily, "I haven't any money, and I can't pay."

"Then you had no right to make a wager with me," said the fat man. "I put up my money, and you said you'd put up yours."

"I want my fifty dollars!" was the burden of the cry set up by the stand owner. "You're a nice one, to go smashing people's property, and then not pay! If it had been an automobile man he'd pay me right off, but you airship fellers ain't no good."

"Oh, let me alone!" cried Noddy. "If any one bothers me any more I'll punch his head. Let me get my machine out of that stand."

"Not until you pay me my fifty dollars," insisted the lemonade man.

"And I ought to hold at least one wing as security until I get my hundred," put in the fat man.

Noddy was beside himself with rage. He looked as if he wanted to fight the whole crowd. There was a movement on one edge of the throng, and a man pushed his way through.

"What's the matter, Noddy?" he asked quietly.

"It's Mr. Nixon, Noddy's father," exclaimed Jerry.

"Oh, I—I had a little accident," explained Noddy to his parent, who had just arrived on the grounds, expecting to see his son sailing about in an airship, for Noddy had boasted much of his *Firefly*.

"An accident? I should say you did," remarked Mr. Nixon, who, though he usually took the part of his bullying son, could at least see such an obvious happening as was spread all about.

"Yes, he busted my stand all to pieces, and I want damages," said the owner, seeing a possible chance for reimbursement.

"And I'd like the hundred dollars I won from him," added the stout man.

"That's right," chorused the crowd, as Mr. Nixon looked at his son for confirmation of these charges. "He made the bet and he smashed the stand."

"Hum!" murmured Mr. Nixon. "Very well, I will settle for him. Where is your tent, Noddy?"

The owner of the wrecked *Firefly* pointed to the canvas structure.

"Come over there," went on Mr. Nixon to the fat man and the stand owner, "and I will pay you. Come, Noddy."

"But—but my airship?"

"Let it go. It's only junk now. You can take the engine out later, and throw the rest on the scrap pile."

Mr. Nixon led his son away, and the crowd dispersed, for it wanted to see the other sights. Thus ended Noddy's first attempt to navigate the air. The accident was destined to have an effect on the future of the motor boys, as you shall see.

CHAPTER VII

IN GREAT PERIL

THE carnival was now in full swing, though not all the exhibits and flying machines had arrived. There was plenty to attract attention beside the airships, for there were several amusement enterprises on the grounds, and the usual devices to catch the dimes and nickels of the throng.

"Well, let's take a look around. I guess we saw all we wanted to of Noddy," said Bob. "Are there any more queer machines?"

"Plenty of them," replied Jerry, "to judge by the tents where they are charging admission."

"Let's take 'em in," suggested Ned. "We want to get all the ideas we can."

"Why?" inquired Andy Rush. "Are you going to build one?"

"Maybe—some day," replied Ned.

"So you're getting the fever too, eh?" asked Jerry with a smile. "Well, it's not a bad idea. I want to see the aeroplane trials. I'm interested in them."

"They'll come off at ten o'clock," said Bob, looking at a program he had purchased. "We've got an hour yet, and likely more, for they'll never start on time."

"Then let's look at some more of the freaks," suggested Jerry.

They found several odd machines housed in tents, or hastily constructed buildings, where from ten cents to a quarter was charged for viewing the product of some inventive brain.

One machine was merely a double bicycle, with a sort of roof overhead made of canvas, and a motor attached, which revolved a two-bladed propeller in front. Another was a sort of aeroplane affair, with two propellers in the rear, and still another was the one modeled after a flying grasshopper, shown by Morris Abernot.

The boys noticed that, as a general thing, the propeller or propellers of all the machines were mounted in front, to pull the ships through the air, instead of acting on a boat principle, and pushing them. But, even with all the power that large motors could impart to the blades, it was difficult to see how some of the machines could rise from the earth, so heavy were they.

The boys concluded, and they were not far wrong, that the machines were merely the output of some freakish brain, that was rather warped on the side of air navigation. Some of the affairs had one or more correct principles, but as for ever being practical they were so far from it as to be laughable.

Nor did the crowd hesitate to laugh whenever it saw anything that seemed grotesque, for some of the affairs were weird in the extreme. There were machines built on the models of birds, fishes and insects, which the inventors had doubtless studied with a firm belief that they could successfully imitate nature.

Probably some of the inventors knew their machines would never leave the earth, but, having gone to the expense of making them, they wanted to get a little money back by charging for a sight of them. And, very likely, the management of the carnival knew that the machines would not work, but probably reasoned that the crowd would like to look at them and derive some fun from the crude attempts to navigate the upper regions.

Certainly Noddy's efforts furnished considerable amusement, and not a little excitement.

It was about ten o'clock when, having made the rounds of the "freaks," as they called them, the boys strolled toward the section devoted to the aeroplanes. Not all of these machines had arrived yet, but several were on hand, and it was announced that at least one inventor would give his a trial, preparatory to the races the next day, when there were to be competitions for prizes.

"Let's get good places to see," proposed Bob.

"The starting platform would be the best place," said Jerry. "We can get up there for a quarter each, and we'll have a good view of how they start and manage the planes."

As is well known, aeroplanes need a sort of flying start in order to become effective. They must get some distance up into the air, like a kite, before they can sustain themselves.

Some machines accomplish this by gliding forward on wheels until they have enough momentum to shoot upward on a plane of air, which catches under the big wings, while others are launched from a high platform or framework by means of men pulling on a long rope, or by weights, springs or similar devices.

At this carnival a high platform had been erected, from which the aeroplanes could shoot off, and once they were started the motor operating the propellers was depended on to keep them in motion, and so up in the air.

The platform was made quite large, to accommodate a crowd, and thither the boys went, getting good places, as they were among the first comers.

"Say, we'll get a fine view from up here," declared Bob as he gazed about.

"That's right—see everything—watch the human birds skim about—swoop this way and that—over our heads—up to the clouds—out of sight—down again——"

"That'll do, Andy," spoke Jerry. "Save your wind; you'll need it later."

There were to have been tests of two aeroplanes, but at the last minute one inventor sent word that his motor was out of order, and he would have to postpone his trial until the afternoon. There was some disappointment and murmuring by the crowd, but when the canvas front of a shed near the platform opened and a curious machine was wheeled into view, there were exclamations of satisfaction.

"They're going to have some sort of a test, anyhow," remarked Bob.

The aeroplane which was being wheeled toward the platform was like many others which you boys have either seen in pictures or actually observed. It consisted of a structure like an immense box-kite, canvas being stretched over a bamboo frame. In front of the main part was a smaller box-kite arrangement, that could be tilted, so as to cause the plane to shoot upward or downward. In the rear was a triangular rudder, and in front, below the device which governed the elevation, were two wooden propellers, worked by a small gasolene motor amidships. There was a sort of box in which the operator could sit.

"This machine," announced the chairman of the arrangement committee, "is the invention of Professor Dundlass——"

"Seems to me everybody around here is a professor," murmured Ned. "We'll have to tack some titles to our names, Professor Hopkins."

"Listen to what he says," counseled Jerry.

"He has made successful flights with it," went on the chairman, "and he will now attempt another. He asks your indulgence, as in a test last week he strained some of the guy wires and bent the rudder, but he will do the best he can. Later he will enter a race."

"Seems as though there was always some excuse for these airship men," murmured Ned. "I guess each wants to have something ready to spring on the crowd in case his machine doesn't work."

But the boys were now too interested in what was going on to indulge in much talk. They watched the inventor and his men wheel the aeroplane to the foot of the platform, and then, by means of ropes and pulleys, it was hoisted up to where there was a sort of inclined track, whence it could glide off.

The machine looked as if it would work. Certainly if a big box-kite can not only sustain itself in the air but also support heavy flags, banners and even dummy figures, as is often done, a machine built on the same principle, only much larger, ought to hold up a man and a small engine.

"This is more like it," said Jerry when Professor Dundlass was adjusting his motor. "It's a wonder Noddy didn't try something like this."

"Oh, he wanted to be different," observed Bob.

"Well, he was," commented Ned dryly.

The aeroplane was now resting on its runners upon the inclined track, which had been made very slippery with soap and grease, as are the ways when a ship is launched. Several men were detailed to give it a push when the inventor was ready to glide off.

But Professor Dundlass seemed in no hurry. He moved slowly about, looking at wires here, braces there, testing his propellers with his hand, looking at the rudder and putting some more oil on the motor.

"Oh, move the boat!" cried an impatient one.

"I go pretty soon quick now," replied the inventor, speaking with a German accent. "But first I must be sure I am all rights. It iss no jokes to fall down from der clouds."

"That's right," agreed the throng in a chorus, and thereafter no one urged him to hurry.

There was a big crowd down on the ground around the platform, and as many on that elevated place as could get upon it and still leave room for the aeroplane. The structure was about sixty feet high.

At last the professor announced that all was in readiness. There was not a little nervous feeling among those in the throng, for though some had seen balloon ascensions, this was different—to see a man trust himself to a machine that was much heavier than air.

"Now, you had betterness stant from under ven I start," called the inventor to those directly in front of the platform. "If I falls on you I might hurt some of you."

He seemed very cool, in spite of what was evidently a dangerous undertaking that was before him. There were some final instructions to the men who were to shove the plane off, and then the inventor, taking his seat in the little box-like car, told one of his assistants to start the motor.

The long-bladed propellers began to whirl around so rapidly that they looked like a yellow haze of light, and the motor, from not being muffled, as that would have made it too heavy, made a terrific racket.

"Shove!" cried the professor suddenly, as he yanked on a lever, and the ten men behind the machine gave a vigorous push.

With a graceful motion, like some great, white-winged bird sailing on a flight from the sky, the aeroplane swooped from the platform. There was a yell from the crowd, and those who, in their enthusiasm, had gathered beneath where it now was hovering over their heads, scrambled to get out of the way, fearing it was falling down on them.

But with a wide sweep, the plane began to ascend. The air caught under the forward box-kite arrangement, and the airship slid upward in a long, graceful curve.

"He's going up! He's going up!" cried Jerry in his enthusiasm. "This one works all right!"

"He's higher than the platform now!" added Ned, and this was so, for the man in the aeroplane was now about seventy feet above the earth. The speed of the motor increased, to judge by the more rapidly recurring explosions, and then, with a shift of the rudder, the inventor changed the course of his machine.

He was now gliding broadside to the platform, and those upon it had an excellent view. There was a great cheer to gladden the heart of the professor.

Once more he shifted his course and made a complete circle. Then he turned and sailed off, directly away from the platform. When several hundred yards off he turned again, and came straight for it.

"He has it under good control," remarked Ned. He had spoken quietly, but so great was the silence maintained by those watching the airship in flight that his voice almost startled him.

"He's going to make a landing," observed Jerry. "He's coming right for the platform. I wonder if he can come down safely. I should think he'd rather land on the ground."

They could see the inventor busy with various wheels and levers. The device for changing the elevation of the plane was lowered. On and on came the big affair, right for the platform.

Suddenly there came a powerful gust of wind, which was most unexpected, as there had not been so much of a breeze before that. Those watching the aeroplane saw it tilt to one side.

"It's going to turn over!" cried several.

Indeed, it did seem so, for it was gliding along at an angle of forty-five degrees. The inventor appeared to be in trouble, and was now clinging with both hands to the sides of his little car.

There came a stronger puff of wind. The aeroplane dived downward and then sailed upward, as does a kite when the tail is not properly adjusted. Then, with a swoop like some gigantic eagle, hurling itself upon its prey, the aeroplane dashed right toward the platform, which was now thronged with people. The inventor had lost control of it in the powerful wind that was now blowing.

"Look out! Here she comes!" was the general cry.

There was a scramble on the part of the throng to get to a place of safety, but there was no place to go. The narrow flight of steps, more like a ladder than anything else, leading from the ground to the top of the platform, was jammed by those seeking to escape.

"It's going to land right here where we are!" cried Andy Rush. "Let's jump off!"

"Stand still!" shouted Jerry. "If you jump you'll be killed. Stand still! He may get control of it again."

But it did not seem possible, though the inventor was working frantically to change the course of his plane, which was now almost upon the platform, over which it appeared likely to sweep, and only a few feet above it.

In another moment it seemed as if scores of people would be either swept off the high place and dashed to the ground, sixty feet below, or would be hit by the aeroplane. The motor boys and those about them were in great peril.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIRIGIBLE BALLOONS

THE platform, which was none too solidly built, began to shake and tremble from the efforts of those on it trying to find some means of escape. They rushed about, pushing and shoving, endeavored to reach the stairs, which were so choked and jammed as to render passage down them impossible.

The aeroplane was now within ten feet of the platform, and was only a few feet above it. It had resumed a level keel, but the wind and its momentum were urging it forward, since the man in charge had stopped his motor and the propellers no longer revolved.

"What shall we do?" cried Andy.

"Stoop down! Stoop down!" shouted Jerry. "It may pass over our heads."

"It's too low now to do that," said Ned in a low voice to Jerry. "I guess we're in for it."

The excitement was now at its height. Scores were sliding and climbing down the crossed up-rights of the platform, getting their hands and clothes full of splinters, but this they did not mind, only so they escaped being swept from the dizzy height.

But suddenly a new danger was presented. The aeroplane dropped in its course and now seemed about to strike the platform at a point below the flooring on which the most of the throng still stood or crouched. Coming on as it was at great speed the airship would probably demolish the frail support, causing the death and injury of many.

Then, with the same suddenness that it had sprung up, the freakish wind shifted and blew at right angles to the course of the plane, and, catching under the broad stretch of muslin and canvas, swerved the ship to one side.

And it was only just in time, for as it rushed past the tower and platform one of the edges of the big box-kite arrangement brushed the guard rail of the structure.

"We're safe! We're safe!" cried Andy Rush.

"Yes, I guess there's no more danger," admitted Jerry. "But no more of this for mine."

"Same here," echoed Ned.

Seeing that the danger was past, the crowd calmed down. They looked for the aeroplane and saw it glide gently to the ground.

"Well, he made a good landing, anyhow," remarked Bob.

"As long as he didn't land on us we're all right," observed Ned. "My, but that was a close shave! After this I'm going to watch the trials from down below."

From the standpoint of an aeroplanist the flight was a great success, for the inventor had been in the air for some time, and had covered considerable space. Professor Dundlass did not appear much put out on account of what had happened.

"It vos great! Vunderful!" he exclaimed as the people gathered about him. "Ven I gets me my motor fixed up a bit I dinks I vin der prize. Oh, it vos a great flight."

Owing to the very evident danger of allowing spectators on the high platform orders were issued soon afterward by the management that no persons, except inventors and their helpers, were to be allowed on it when the aeroplanes were sent off.

"Well, we've seen enough for one morning," remarked Ned, when they had reached the ground and taken another look at the aeroplane. "Let's get some lunch."

"Good idea," declared Jerry. "Come on."

There were several hastily-constructed restaurants on the carnival grounds, some in wooden buildings and some under tents. The boys voted for a tent, and made their way toward a large one. When they neared it Jerry heard a girl's voice exclaim:

"There are the motor boys!"

He turned to behold Mollie Horton, one of the girls of Cresville, with whom he and his chums were on friendly terms.

"Hello, Mollie!" called Jerry. "Come and have lunch with us."

"You'd better wait until you see who's with me," she replied. "Perhaps you will wish to recall your invitation. Alice Vines and Helen Gale are right over here."

"Bring them along," invited Ned. "That'll be one apiece for us, and Andy can be chaperon."

"One what apiece?" asked Bob, who was looking at a man selling box-kites.

"Girls, of course, you chump. Don't you want a nice girl to take to dinner?"

"Sure!" replied Chunky, looking around. Mollie motioned for Alice and Helen to join her, and soon the merry party were seated at a table beneath a cool tent.

Jerry ordered a substantial lunch, much to Bob's delight, and finished it off with plates of ice cream.

"What are you girls going to do this afternoon?" asked Jerry as they left the table.

"Oh, just look about," replied Alice. "We only came on the noon train, and we haven't seen anything yet. Have you?"

"I should say we had," replied Ned. "We saw Noddy Nixon try to fly, and we saw a man try out his aeroplane."

"Did Noddy really fly?" asked Mollie.

"Well, not so's you could notice it," replied Ned with grim humor, and the other boys laughed.

"There is going to be an exhibition of dirigible balloons this afternoon," announced Andy Rush, consulting his program. "We ought to take that in."

"We sure will," declared Jerry. "Now, what will we do until it's time for them?"

"Let's go for a spin in the car and cool off after dinner," proposed Bob, and his idea was voted a good one. There was room, with a little squeezing, for all of them, and they went out in the suburbs for several miles, returning in time to see several big balloons in process of inflation.

Hydrogen gas, manufactured on the grounds by means of sulphuric acid and iron filings, was the lifting power of the balloons. There were several of them, built in different shapes and sizes, but on the same principle.

That is, they depended on the lifting power of the gas to get them up in the air. Once elevated there were motors, working propeller blades, to send them along, a box-kite arrangement for slanting up higher or descending, and a rudder to steer to right or left. These attachments were contained in a light framework car, which was fastened to the gas bag by means of a network of cords. All the gas bags were cigar-shaped, none of the old-fashioned globular ones being used.

"This will be worth watching," prophesied Jerry. "There will be no danger to us, and we can see several in the air at once. There'll probably be a race. Let's get a place where there isn't such a crowd."

They moved off to one side, where they could get a good view. There were four dirigible balloons in process of inflation. Slowly the oiled silk gas containers filled, as the light hydrogen vapor poured into them. Men were busy about them, straightening out the cords, attaching bags of ballast or adjusting the motors.

The wind had died out to a gentle breeze, and there was every prospect of a successful ascension.

On all sides could be heard comments concerning what was about to take place.

"There, they seem to be all ready. All the balloons are filled," remarked Mollie. "I almost wish I was going up in one."

"Oh, I wouldn't! Not for the whole world!" exclaimed Alice.

"Me either. Not for two worlds!" added Helen.

"Hello, there's another," remarked Bob as he saw a tent being opened, and the pointed nose of a fifth balloon was poked out.

"So it is," admitted Jerry. "Say, that's a queer one. It's a balloon and aeroplane combined. That's the stuff. That ought to do all sorts of stunts."

"That's the kind I want," declared Bob. "You wouldn't run much risk in that. If the gas gave out or the bag busted you could depend on the planes, and if they broke, why, you would be held up by the balloon."

"Suppose they both broke?" asked Helen.

"Then—oh, then—well, of course——"

But Bob was spared the trouble of finding an answer by a shout from the crowd, which told that something had happened.

An instant later five big bodies shot into the air, as the men holding the balloons to the earth let go of them.

"There they go! There they go!" cried Andy Rush. "It's a race—the dirigible balloon race! Whoop la!"

CHAPTER IX

A RACE IN THE AIR

ANDY'S excitement was shared not only by the motor boys and their girl friends, but by the vast throng gathered on the carnival grounds. There was something inspiring in the sight of the vast bulks of the balloons, skimming along through the air like gigantic birds. They seemed to demonstrate man's conquest of the upper regions, even as the locomotive, the automobile and motor boats have shown what they can do to annihilate space on the earth and in the water.

As the balloons rose in the air they seemed to become smaller, and then they all headed in the same direction, for, as Andy had said, there was to be a race of the dirigible machines.

The motors of the balloons, banging away, sounded like a battle in the air, and the propellers whirled about so swiftly that they could not be seen from the earth.

The airships went up perhaps two hundred feet, all of them remaining near one another. Then, in a graceful sweep, they headed for a distant church steeple, about three miles away, in the city of Broadlands.

The conditions of the race, Andy told his friends, was that the first dirigible to circle the steeple and return to the grounds was to win a valuable prize. In order to distinguish the airships they had large numerals, from one to five, painted on strips of muslin and fastened to them.

"They're off!" cried Bob as the balloons, lining up, started away toward the goal. They were so far distant now that the explosions of the motors could only be faintly heard.

"I'm for number three!" cried Mollie Horton. "That looks as if it would win. Don't you think so, Jerry?"

"I don't like to differ from a young lady, and a pretty one at that," replied Jerry, bowing to Mollie, "but I think number five will win."

This was the balloon with planes attached to it, which had last made its appearance. It was not so large, nor seemingly as powerful as any of the others, but Jerry had reasons of his own for choosing that one, in what was only a sort of friendly guessing contest among the young folks.

"If we were in the auto now, we could follow them," said Ned. "See, some of the people are doing that."

"We're just as well off here," declared Jerry. "We can see the finish. Besides, they'll come back quicker than they are going on this trip, and they may beat the autos."

"What makes you think they'll return more quickly?" asked Ned.

"Because they'll come back with the wind. You see they beat out against the breeze, and then, if an accident happens, and their motor stops, they can drift back with the wind to their sheds or tents. A fellow who is helping one of the owners of a dirigible told me that. It's one of the tricks of contests like this. You see, the wind will blow them back, and if they don't have an accident, with the power of their motors to help the breeze, they're bound to come back in a hurry."

"Smart lad!" exclaimed Bob. "You are getting ready for our motor ship, I see."

"Are you boys going to have a motor ship?" asked Alice Vines with great interest.

"We might; you never can tell," returned Ned. "Stranger things have happened."

"I think strange things are always happening to you boys," commented Helen. "But I never, never would go in an airship."

"Maybe you will in ours," said Bob.

"No, I'll not," she said. "I'm afraid to even go up on a high ladder to pick cherries, and I know I'd faint if I was ever as high as those men are. I don't see how they dare do it."

She motioned to the operators of the dirigible balloons, which were now only small specks in the blue sky.

"Who's ahead?" asked Andy.

"You can't tell at this distance," said Jerry. "But they'll soon be coming back."

It was so interesting, watching the race in the air, even though it was some distance off, that the time passed quickly. Almost before the young people realized it the balloons seemed to be getting larger.

"They're coming back!" cried Ned.

"That's what!" declared Jerry. "Now we can see which one will win. None of them seems to have had any accidents."

On the wind there were now borne to the ears of the waiting crowd the sounds of the motor explosions. Every moment they became louder.

"Number two is going to win!" cried Andy. "It's ahead!"

"Yes, Jerry, I think you selected the wrong one," remarked Mollie.

"Wait," was all Jerry said.

As they watched they saw number five balloon suddenly shoot up into the air. The operator had shifted his elevation rudder.

"What's he doing that for?" asked Mollie.

"He probably wants to get into a swifter current of air," said Jerry. "He knows I want him to win, and he's very obliging."

"Number four will take the prize," declared Andy, changing his mind. "See, it's running away from the others."

Indeed, it did look as if that balloon, which was the longest one of the five, would come in ahead. It was rapidly shooting forward, and was only about half a mile from where the start had been made.

But there are tricks and surprises in ballooning as in everything else, as the motor boys and their friends soon learned. Number five balloon, which had ascended to a considerable height, was suddenly seen to descend. So rapidly did it shoot down that there were cries of alarm from the throng.

"He's had an accident! His motor has stopped! The gas is leaking out! He'll fall!"

But the man in the balloon, who could now be seen as a small black object, did not seem to be alarmed. He was calmly shifting several handles and ropes.

"He's going to win," said Jerry quietly.

"Don't be too sure," cautioned Ned.

"You'll see," was Jerry's reply.

Hardly had he spoken when the descent of number five was further quickened. Like an eagle swooping down from the heights it fell toward the earth, and a little later it had assumed an even keel and shot over the finishing line, a winner by several lengths.

What a shout went up then! Not only at the success of the daring navigator of the air, but at the whole spectacle, for presently all the other ships of the clouds had finished the course, and were hovering in the air above the heads of the throng, while the aeronauts were throwing out ropes, that they and their machines might be pulled back to the earth.

"Do you see how he did it?" asked Jerry of his chums.

"Not exactly, but he evidently won," replied Ned. "How did he manage to get ahead of the others?"

"Why, he practically slid down a hillside of air. He went up until he struck a current that would carry him a little faster than the air strata would on which the others were shooting along. Then, when he was near enough to the line, he pointed the nose of his balloon downward by shifting the elevation rudder, and he came slanting down, just as we slide down a hill on our bob-sled. He had his motor to help him, and he acquired a speed that the others could not."

"Say, you know something about ballooning," remarked Andy admiringly.

"You bet he does. It will come in handy when we get our motor ship," commented Bob. "I do wish we had one like that dirigible, with the planes on either side of it. Let's go over and take a look at it. It's down now. I wonder if we could ever build one like that, Jerry?"

"I could—and a better one, too," suddenly said a man standing near the motor boys.

They turned and regarded him curiously. He was rather young-looking, but he had gray hair, and he seemed respectable.

"Could you build a balloon like that?" asked Ned.

"I could—and a better one—one that would go farther and stay up longer—but I'd need considerable money to do it.

Jerry looked at the man critically. A daring plan had come into his mind.

CHAPTER X

PLANNING A MOTOR SHIP

The crowd was running from all directions to get closer views of the dirigible balloons before they should be put away in the tents or sheds. The man who had spoken to Ned stood near the motor boys and their friends.

"Excuse me for intruding," he said with a smile, "but I could not help hearing what you were talking about, and I felt that it would not be out of place to say what I did."

"Are you a builder of airships?" asked Jerry.

"I have built one or two. I am also a balloonist. I have plans, just perfected, for a very fine motor ship, something like that one with planes attached to the gas bag, but a great improvement over it. But I need money to build it. I have a model, however."

"Where is it?" asked Jerry.

"At my home in Middletown."

"That's not far from where we are," exclaimed

Ned. "We're from Cresville," he added for the stranger's benefit.

"Are you interested in airships?" asked the man.

"Very much so," was Jerry's answer. "We would like to see your model, Mr.—ah——"

"Glassford is my name—Rupert Glassford."

"Why didn't you bring your model here to exhibit it?" asked Bob.

"Because the committee would not let me. I offered to, but they said they only wanted real machines that would sail through the air."

"Like Noddy's tin fly," spoke Ned with a laugh.

"Yes, that's a sample of some of the freaks they allowed to be exhibited here," went on the man somewhat bitterly. "But a real airship, built on up-to-date ideas, even if it was only a model, they wouldn't admit. If I could have shown it perhaps I could have induced some rich man to put up money enough to build one. As it is, I'll have to wait—and see others get ahead of me, perhaps."

"Maybe we could help you," said Jerry quietly. "How much would it take to build your motor ship?"

"More than you boys could raise, I'm afraid."

"You don't know how much these boys can

raise!" exclaimed Andy Rush admiringly. "They own a gold mine."

Mr. Glassford laughed.

"I guess you're affected by some of the sights you've seen at this carnival," he said to the little chap.

"It's true enough," spoke Jerry quietly. "We do own an interest in a valuable gold mine, and we have considerable money. If a motor ship did not cost too much we might build it."

"Do you mean that?" exclaimed the man, a hopeful look coming into his face.

"Certainly. I have been thinking of it for some time. Ever since I heard of this carnival. I don't know how my chums feel about it, but, as for me, I'm for an airship."

"And we're with you!" cried Ned and Bob.

"Get an airship, Jerry," added Ned.

"One with planes, so if we fall we'll come down easy," put in Bob.

"Chunky's so heavy he doesn't relish a fall from the clouds," remarked Alice.

"Are you boys really in earnest?" asked Mr. Glassford.

"We certainly are," declared Jerry. "If you can show us a good model of a motor ship, and your plans seem feasible, though I admit we don't know much about such things, we will furnish the money to build a dirigible balloon, provided, of course, that the cost is not too high."

"It will not cost as much as a high-class automobile would," said Mr. Glassford. "For five thousand dollars I can build my motor ship, and I know you'll be satisfied with it."

"When can we see the plans and model?" inquired Jerry.

"Any time you want to. I'll bring them to Cresville if you say so."

"That would be a good idea. Bob's and Ned's fathers would probably want to look them over, and my mother will likely take an interest in them. So if you can come to Cresville next week we will meet you. Suppose you come to my house?"

"I will be very pleased to. I can furnish references that I know my business. I have built a number of balloons, but this is my first attempt at a dirigible one. I know I can succeed, however, and if you will furnish the cash there is no reason why you boys cannot take a long trip in one."

"A trip for fame and fortune!" exclaimed Ned enthusiastically. "Me for the motor ship. Automobiling and motor boating are back numbers now."

Mr. Glassford left soon after this, promising to come to Cresville in about a week, bringing his plans and model with him, and also his references.

"Well, I wonder if there'll be anything more to see this afternoon?" remarked Jerry as the group of young people moved away from the vicinity of the dirigible balloons, which had nearly all been put away.

"Kite-flying contests are on the program," said Andy.

But neither the boys nor girls cared much for this, so they went to a vaudeville show on the grounds, and then Ned treated the crowd to ice cream. After that it was time for the girls to start home, as they had only come with the intention of remaining one day.

The boys bade them good-by with some feelings of regret, and went to their hotel.

The following three days at the carnival were given up to other contests of the dirigible balloons, in every one of which number five, Jerry's favorite, was a winner. There were also aeroplane races and contests, and, though these heavier-than-air machines were rather limited in their flights, some of them did remarkably well. But the boys held to the dirigible balloon as the model which they would have if everything went well and there was no objection to their owning a motor ship.

They left the carnival on Friday, as it was to close the following day, and motored back to Cresville, having spent an enjoyable week and learned much about airships.

"I wonder what happened to Noddy after his *Firefly* tried to plow up the earth?" asked Bob.

"I heard he took what was left of his machine away from the grounds," replied Andy, who was a good news gatherer.

"Well, we'll show him an airship as is an airship," remarked Ned. "Wait until we get Mr. Glassford to work on his."

"We'll put it all over Noddy," was Bob's opinion. "Won't he be mad, though!"

"Well, I only hope we can get a motor ship that will work," said Jerry thoughtfully. "The more I see and hear of these air machines the more uncertain I think they are. A strong wind seems to play topsy-turvy with them. See what happened to the aeroplane.

"Oh, ours won't be that kind," declared Ned. "We'll fly, all right. I wish we had it now, instead of this auto, to get home in."

"You ought to be glad of the auto," replied Jerry. "Still, I wish, too, that we had our new motor ship."

CHAPTER XI

BUILDING THE COMET

ONE evening, about a week after this, Jerry Hopkins was seen hurrying down the main street of Cresville. He walked fast and hardly looked from right to left.

"Hello, Jerry," called Frank Merton, one of his town friends, "come over and have a plate of ice cream."

"No, thanks. Haven't time, Frank. I'm in a hurry to catch Bob and Ned. Haven't seen either of them around, have you?"

"No. If I see 'em I'll tell 'em you were lookin' for 'em."

"I wish you would. It's quite important."

"Those motor boys are up to some new scheme, I'll bet a lemon," remarked Frank as he strolled on. "They're always goin' off somewhere, or havin' a good time. I wish I was in their crowd."

Which is what a number of other boys, not only of Cresville, but of other places, have also wished.

Jerry hurried on, but he did not catch sight of either of his chums. He proceeded to Ned Slade's house, and there, on the big front porch, comfortably swinging in hammocks, were the two lads.

"Well, I must say you're taking it easy," observed Jerry.

"Sure. Why not?" asked Bob. "What's your rush? You look as if you'd been walking fast."

"So I have. I've been looking for you two. He's come."

"Who's come?" asked Ned.

"Mr. Glassford, the man who's going to build our motor ship for us. He arrived at my house half an hour ago. He was delayed in getting his model shipped, and that's why he wasn't here yesterday, when we expected him."

"Has he got the model now?" inquired Ned.

"Yes, and it's a dandy."

"Did he bring plans, so he can build a big one for us?" demanded Bob.

"He sure did. Come on and look 'em over. That's why I came for you. Did you tell your folks about our plans?"

"You mean building an airship?" asked Ned.

"Sure."

"I did," declared Bob. "My mother thinks it's all talk, but we'll show her."

"My dad doesn't take much stock in it," remarked Ned. "I guess he thinks it will fizzle out."

"Wait until they see the plans and the model," said Jerry. "That will show we mean business. But come on. I told Mr. Glassford I'd come right back with you."

All enthusiasm, the two boys leaped from the hammocks, and were soon accompanying Jerry back to his house. There they found their acquaintance of the carnival, but what attracted their attention as soon as they entered the library where he was sitting was a complete model of a curious airship, about three feet long, which was suspended from the chandelier.

"There's a small size model of the future *Comet,*" exclaimed Jerry. "You see, I've named our motor ship already, just as I did our motor boat."

"Comet's a good name," was Mr. Glassford's opinion. "Now, if you boys will draw up your chairs I'll briefly explain my plans for a motor ship."

With the aid of diagrams, blue-prints, sketches, profiles and some simple tables of calculations, Mr. Glassford demonstrated, by frequent references to the model, just how it would be possible to sail through the air for a long time in a ship built on the lines of his invention.

The motor ship was to consist of a big cigar-shaped bag of very strong material to hold the gas. It was divided into several compartments, so that in case one or even three or four were punctured there would be enough sustaining power to keep the ship and its crew afloat. The gas used was a combination of hydrogen and another vapor, the secret of which Mr. Glassford would not disclose. Sufficient to say that it was a very powerful combination.

The gas bag fitted inside a light but very strong framework, braced with piano wire, and on either side of this frame, standing at right angles to the long bag, were several planes, made of light canvas, stretched over poles of bamboo. These, in effect, made a combined balloon and aeroplane, giving the advantages of both, and somewhat neutralizing the defects of each one.

Below the bag, with the framework supporting the planes, was the body of the ship—the car—containing the motor and the devices for operating it, as well as the rudders, propellers and planes, which could be shifted.

The car was large, or, rather, the plans called for a good-sized one. There would be a comfortable cabin, in which the travelers would live during the day, doing their cooking on a stove which utilized the exhaust gas from the motor. There was also another room, where five small berths provided sleeping accommodations. These berths could be folded up during the day, and as the room containing them was well forward, it made a good place to sit when the ship was in motion, for an excellent view could be had from the big windows.

The entire car was enclosed, so that storms would not affect the travelers. The motor was in a small room by itself, and there was a little pilot house, on top of the bunk room, in which the operator stood, being able to control, stop or start the motor from there, as well as adjust the two rudders or shift the planes.

There were two sets of rudders, though one, as has been explained, was more like a big box-kite than a rudder. This controlled the depression or elevation of the ship. The other, shaped like a fish-tail, sent it to right or left.

The planes on either side of the gas bag were intended to better balance the motor ship, to render it less liable to be sent out of its course by contrary winds, and to support it in case of accidents. The planes were on the same principle as a bird's wings.

when it is gliding or swooping down from a great height.

There was ample store room for supplies, provisions, some ballast and a few duplicate parts of the motor. Water was carried in a large tank, and there was another for a plentiful supply of gasolene. The motor ship had many novel features, and there were so many points of interest about it, as Mr. Glassford explained to them, that the boys hardly noted them all at the time of going over the plans.

"It certainly seems as if it would work," remarked Bob at length.

"Oh, it will work," declared the inventor quickly. "Why, the gas bag, with the peculiar vapor I put into it, would lift twice as much weight as I intend to carry."

"And you say it will not cost more than six thousand dollars to build it?" asked Jerry.

"I think I can easily do it for five thousand. That is less than you paid for your touring car, you told me."

"Yes; with the improvements we've put on it the cost has run beyond that," admitted Jerry. "Well, fellows, what do you say? Shall we use part of our income from the gold mine, and build the *Comet?*"

"Sure," replied Ned quickly.

"Every time," added Bob. "I want a trip through the air."

"Then the next thing is to tell your folks, and get their consent to spend the money," went on Jerry. "I have already won my mother over."

Though the boys had a considerable sum at their disposal, from a gold mine which they had been fortunate enough to help an old prospector to discover on one of their trips, they never spent an unusual sum without obtaining the consent of their parents.

"When can you let me know?" asked Mr. Glassford somewhat anxiously.

"To-morrow," replied Bob, and Ned nodded to indicate that he too would have an answer by then.

"How long will it take to build it after we provide the money?" asked Jerry.

"About a month. You see, much of the material I will need is already in stock in shops that make a specialty of airship supplies. The motor I can easily get, and the principal work will be putting the ship together. You boys can help me on it, and in a month, at the most, we ought to be able to make our first trip."

"That's the stuff!" cried Bob.

"I'm going home now, and see dad," said Ned, as he got up. "I'm so anxious I can't wait."

"Bring your parents here, and let me explain my plans to them," proposed Mr. Glassford, and this was voted a good idea.

At first Ned's and Bob's folks only laughed at their sons' pleas, but as the boys insisted that they really meant to have an airship, Mr. and Mrs. Slade and Mr. and Mrs. Baker finally gave in, and accompanied the lads to Jerry's house. There Mr. Glassford went over all the details again, explaining how it was practically impossible to run any serious risk.

Not without some misgivings, however, did the respective parents give their consent. But they finally did, which was all the boys cared about, and a contract was drawn up and signed by Mr. Glassford and Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Baker and Mr. Slade, the boys being barred because they were not of legal age.

It was arranged that Mr. Glassford should have the use of a big loft in a storage building owned by Mr. Slade, where he kept some of the goods sold in his department store. There the work of building the airship could be started. When it had progressed as far as was possible in there, it was to be taken out and a large tent erected in a vacant lot. There the gas bag could be inflated, the planes and car attached, and all made ready for a flight.

Mr. Glassford lost no time, once the money was provided, and in less than a week from his arrival in Cresville he was at work on the ship, with three enthusiastic boys to aid him—no, four boys, for Andy Rush was allowed to come in, though he talked more than he worked.

CHAPTER XII

NODDY MAKES TROUBLE

Of course, it was impossible, in a small town like Cresville, for the motor boys to undertake the building of anything as large as a motor ship without the news becoming pretty generally known. In fact, almost everything the three chums did was town-talk, for they were well-known and popular lads, and a source of no little pride to the residents of the place, who were eager to tell of the exploits of the lads.

So, naturally, Noddy Nixon heard of the boys' project. Noddy was sore over the failure of his *Firefly*. He was also angry because he had lost his wager with the fat man, and because his father had cut down his allowance on account of the damages Mr. Nixon had had to pay for the destruction of the lemonade stand.

The construction of the *Comet* had not been under way more than a week ere Noddy began making slighting remarks about it to whoever would listen to him.

Nor did he confine his remarks to friends or acquaintances of the motor boys. Whenever he saw Jerry, Ned or Bob in the street he would, in passing, remark, loud enough for them to hear, something about their motor ship, ending with a sneering phrase or laugh. But the boys paid no attention to him. They had faith in Mr. Glassford, and, to tell the truth, they were so busy helping the inventor that they had little time to bother with Noddy.

At length the building of the motor ship had progressed as far as was possible in the somewhat contracted space of the loft. The gas bag was all sewed, the framework was all ready to be put together, the planes had been made, the rudders constructed, and now little remained to do but assemble the ship, and then fit up the car, or body of it. The motor was on hand, but had not been set in its place.

Jerry had arranged to hire a big tent from Boston, and this had been set up in the midst of a field owned by Mr. Baker. Of course, after this had been done, there crowded out to the canvas shelter nearly every inhabitant of Cresville, for every one was anxious to get a view of the wonderful airship.

But the boys hired several men to mount guard, for, though they did not want to deprive their friends of an opportunity to see the invention, they feared lest some too-curious one might cause damage by handling parts of the machinery or ship.

So they only admitted a few at a time, and this only after working hours, when they and Mr. Glassford could be on hand to watch over their property. The *Comet* was beginning to assume shape now, and looked like a real airship, though the big bag was only half filled with gas, enough to partly distend it, so that the cord netting could be constructed over it.

One day, when the boys and Mr. Glassford were quite busy, there entered the tent an old man. The boys did not see him at first, as he was on the opposite side of the gas bag, but Jerry's attention was attracted by seeing the gas envelope sway, and when he looked he saw the old man trying to tear it.

"Here! What are you doing?" cried Jerry. "Keep your hands off that. How'd you get in here, anyhow?"

"I jest walked in. I ain't never seen a airship, an' I wanted to see if this here stuff was strong," was the answer given in a high-pitched, unpleasant voice. The old man continued to pull on the bag, though it was strong enough to resist his efforts.

"Drop that and clear out of here!" cried Jerry, recognizing the old man as Sid Joffy, a sort of recluse and town character, who was a general nuisance. He was too lazy to work, and how he managed to live no one knew. He had an old cabin in the woods, on the edge of a clearing, and resided there all alone.

"What's this? Your engine?" went on Joffy, letting go of the gas bag and beginning to turn some wheels and valves on the gasolene motor, which stood in one corner of the tent.

"Can't you leave things alone?" cried Mr. Glassford sharply. "Who let him in, boys?"

"Guess he must have slipped past Tom Johnson at the tent flap," replied Jerry. "Come, now, Sid, clear out of here. You can see us when we go up."

"I want to see how the thing works," went on the old man, moving away from Jerry, who was approaching. "I like machinery considerable," and he began to pull on the lever that operated the elevation rudder.

"Drop that and get out of here, or we'll put you out!" cried Jerry, now thoroughly aroused, and the old man hastened from the tent.

"What do you suppose brought him around?" asked Ned, as he paused in the work of tightening the bolts on the framework.

7924

"Oh, he's a general butter-in," said Bob. "He's always around where he isn't wanted."

"Well, I guess I scared him off," remarked Jerry with a laugh.

But that same afternoon Joffy was back again. This time he crawled under the tent, and before the boys were aware of his presence he had knocked a heavy wrench down from a bench and broken one of the bamboo braces of the air planes.

"Here, you! You're worse than the kids!" cried Jerry. "What are you doing here, anyhow?"

"I—I didn't mean to break it," said the old man. "I wanted to see how heavy that wrench was."

"Well, you saw, all right," went on Jerry. "Now clear out."

"That's rather funny, him coming back," said Ned, after the man had gone. "Do you suppose he's trying to steal some of your ideas, Mr. Glassford?"

"No, I don't believe so. My greatest secret is the gas, and no one knows that but myself."

"Sid Joffy is too lazy to steal anything," remarked Bob. "He wouldn't steal second or third base if he was playing on a ball nine. I guess he hasn't anything else to do, and he comes around here to bother us."

"I wish he'd keep away," spoke Jerry.

He wished that more strongly than ever the next day, when the old man was again found in the tent, though how he entered the boys did not know. This time, before he could be detected, he had unscrewed some of the framework, and caused it to sag over against the bag, which it might have punctured.

"Say! This is the limit!" cried Ned. "What are you up to, anyhow, Joffy?"

"I—I just wanted to see how tight you had to have your frame. I—I didn't mean any harm."

"Well, you've done harm, all right," said Jerry angrily. "If we catch you in here again we'll run you down to the river and duck you."

"That ought to keep him away," observed Bob, when the nuisance had hurried from the tent. "He hates water. I guess he never took a bath in his life."

"There's something queer about his coming around here, boys," said Jerry. "I don't like it. Seems to me as if he had more of an object than mere curiosity. We must keep watch of him."

"It is rather odd that he comes over here so often," admitted Ned. "It's quite a distance from his shack, and he doesn't like walking, or any other exercise."

But the secret of Joffy's visits was disclosed the next day, when Andy Rush, all excited and hardly able to breathe, hurried into the tent.

"I seen 'em!" he cried. "Joffy an' Noddy—talking together—they're up to some trick—Noddy pointed toward our tent—Joffy nodded his head—then Noddy gave him some money. I'll bet Noddy's put him up to all this—to bother you boys."

"That's it!" declared Jerry emphatically. "I knew it must be something more than Joffy's curiosity that brought him here. Boys, this is part of Noddy's plan to make trouble for us. He's mad because we're going to have a better airship than his tin fly that never flew. But we'll fix him!"

"Let's make sure that he put Joffy up to it, though," proposed Ned.

"Oh, that will be easy enough. Wait until the old man comes in again and I'll tackle him."

They had not long to wait. That very afternoon the old nuisance sneaked in again, coming under the tent so quietly that he was not noticed until a crash in a corner told that something had happened. Joffy, in reaching up to finger one of the big propellers, had knocked it from the shaft, to which it was not yet fastened. Fortunately, little damage had been done.

"There you are again!" cried Jerry.

"Yes—yes—Mr. Hopkins—I'm here agin," admitted Joffy with an uneasy grin. "I—I didn't mean to do any damage. I—I jest wanted to see if that there thing-a-ma-bob would whirl around."

"Well, it did, all right, and you might have broken it. If you had we would arrest you for malicious mischief."

"Arrest me! Why, I ain't done nothin'!"

"Yes, you have!" exclaimed Jerry. "You're taking money from Noddy Nixon to come here and annoy us. Now, don't deny it!" he cried as he saw that the old man was about to protest. "Andy Rush saw you. We know, now, why you sneak in here. You want to keep away if you don't want to get arrested."

"All right—all right, Mr. Hopkins. I'll go if you don't want me around."

"Of course we don't want you."

"But I didn't mean no harm. I jest—I jest wanted to see if that there big thing like a paddle would go around."

"Well, you saw; now vamoose."

"Do you think he'll keep away?" asked Ned, as the old man crawled under the tent and went outside.

"I don't believe he will because I told him to," said Jerry, "but I've got a plan to make him."

"What is it?"

"Come over here and I'll tell you."

CHAPTER XIII

JOFFY SEES A "GHOST"

FOLLOWING a low-voiced conversation among the boys, to which Andy Rush, in recognition of the service he had rendered, was admitted, Bob exclaimed:

"That's the stuff! That ought to cure him of bothering us. How soon can you have it ready, Jerry?"

"In a couple of days. I'll work on it at odd times, as I don't want things here to get behind. There's lots to do yet on the airship."

"I hope you boys are not going to desert me," remarked Mr. Glassford, as he overheard Jerry's closing words. "I'll need your help every day now."

"No, we're only getting up a little plan to scare that old nuisance, Joffy, and keep him away from this tent," explained Jerry. "If we don't, he's likely to damage our *Comet.*"

"Indeed, he is. Scare him good and proper while you're at it. But now, if you're ready, we'll adjust the planes and see how they look."

The boys were very busy the remainder of the day, and when they were finished the airship looked more than ever like a machine that would navigate the upper regions. It was large and imposing, and would be more so when the car containing the machinery was in position.

That night Jerry and his chums spent several hours in the big tent, taking cautious observations outside, every now and then, to see that neither Noddy nor Joffy were sneaking around to spy on them. The motor boys were not much bothered by the lads of the town, for they had promised all the youngsters, who did not annoy them by trying to gain admittance to the tent at forbidden times, a trip in the airship.

"Well, it's 'most done," remarked Ned, when, close to midnight, the boys left the tent, a watchman being on guard to insure that no damage would come to the *Comet.*

"Yes, we did better than I thought we would," admitted Jerry. "I can make the dummy to-morrow night and then, with a couple of lanterns fastened to it, we'll be all ready to give Joffy something to think about."

The next day the troublesome old man was seen around the tent, but he did not attempt to enter. Possibly he did not see a good chance to annoy the boys.

"Is everything ready, Jerry?" asked Bob that evening, when, after their day's work on the airship, the four lads were gathered in the tent.

"All ready," replied the chief conspirator. "All I have to do is daub a little phosphorus on the dummy and it will be in shape to do the ghost dance. But I don't want to do that until the last minute. How's the wind, Ned?"

"Good, and in the right direction. We can stand in the clearing, and let it go right over his cabin."

"That's the stuff. Well, we'll start as soon as it gets a little darker."

Jerry and his chums gathered up several mysterious-looking packages, and a little later they left the tent by the rear, crawling under the canvas to keep out of sight of any prying ones who might be gathered in front.

It was about a mile to where Sid Joffy lived alone in his cabin on the edge of the clearing. The boys soon covered the distance, however, and came to a halt in a little clump of woodland, just opposite the somewhat dilapidated shack where the shiftless man made his home.

"He's in, for I can see a light in the cabin," whispered Ned.

"There's no telling by that," replied Jerry. "He'd leave a lamp burning all day and night rather than take the trouble to blow it out. Sneak up there and take a look in."

"I will," volunteered Bob.

"No, Chunky, you're too heavy to go lightly. Let Andy go. He's small and not so easily seen. But hold your hand over your mouth, Andy, so you won't get to talking by mistake."

"I won't," promised the little chap, proud to be in on some scheme with his friends the motor boys.

He glided off into the darkness, and presently returned.

"Is Joffy there?" asked Ned.

"Yes, and some one's with him."

"Who?"

"Noddy Nixon!"

"Noddy! Then he's probably plotting with Joffy to annoy us in some other way," declared Jerry in a whisper. "Well, we'll kill two birds with one stone, and give Noddy a scare too. Have you got the cord fastened on, Ned?"

"Yep. It's all right. Easy, there, Bob, you nearly stepped through the kite."

"Yes; don't break that, or it's all off," cautioned Jerry, as he anxiously inspected a large box-kite, which was one of the things he and his chums had brought along. It was not damaged, and a little later it was silently rising through the air, floating in the direction of Joffy's lonely cottage.

"Now for the dummy," whispered Jerry. "Hold the kite string, Bob, while I fasten the 'ghost' on."

Bob did as requested, and Jerry attached to the stout kite cord a light figure, in the shape of a man, but clad in ghostly white.

"Now for the phosphorus," went on Jerry, when he had the dummy in place. "Don't get it on your clothes, fellows."

He poured a solution of the glowing stuff over the dummy, and then more cord was let out. There was a good breeze blowing, and soon the kite had carried the dummy right over the cabin.

"Now the lanterns," ordered Jerry. "Hand 'em here, Ned."

Ned passed over two red Chinese lanterns, in which candles were burning. They were fastened to the string, and when up in the air looked like two fiery eyes, staring down from the blackness, for the night was very dark.

"Say, that's all to the lolly-pops!" exclaimed Andy in a hoarse whisper. "That'll scare him out of a year's growth."

"It isn't so bad," admitted Jerry, "even if I did make it myself."

He let out some more string, and then he and the other boys went a little nearer to the cabin, taking care to keep out of sight by crouching down behind the underbrush.

"All ready, fellows," whispered Jerry a little while afterward. "Groan for all you're worth!"

A moment later such a series of unearthly noises came from the depths of the woods that it sounded as though something dreadful had happened. The boys fairly outdid themselves.

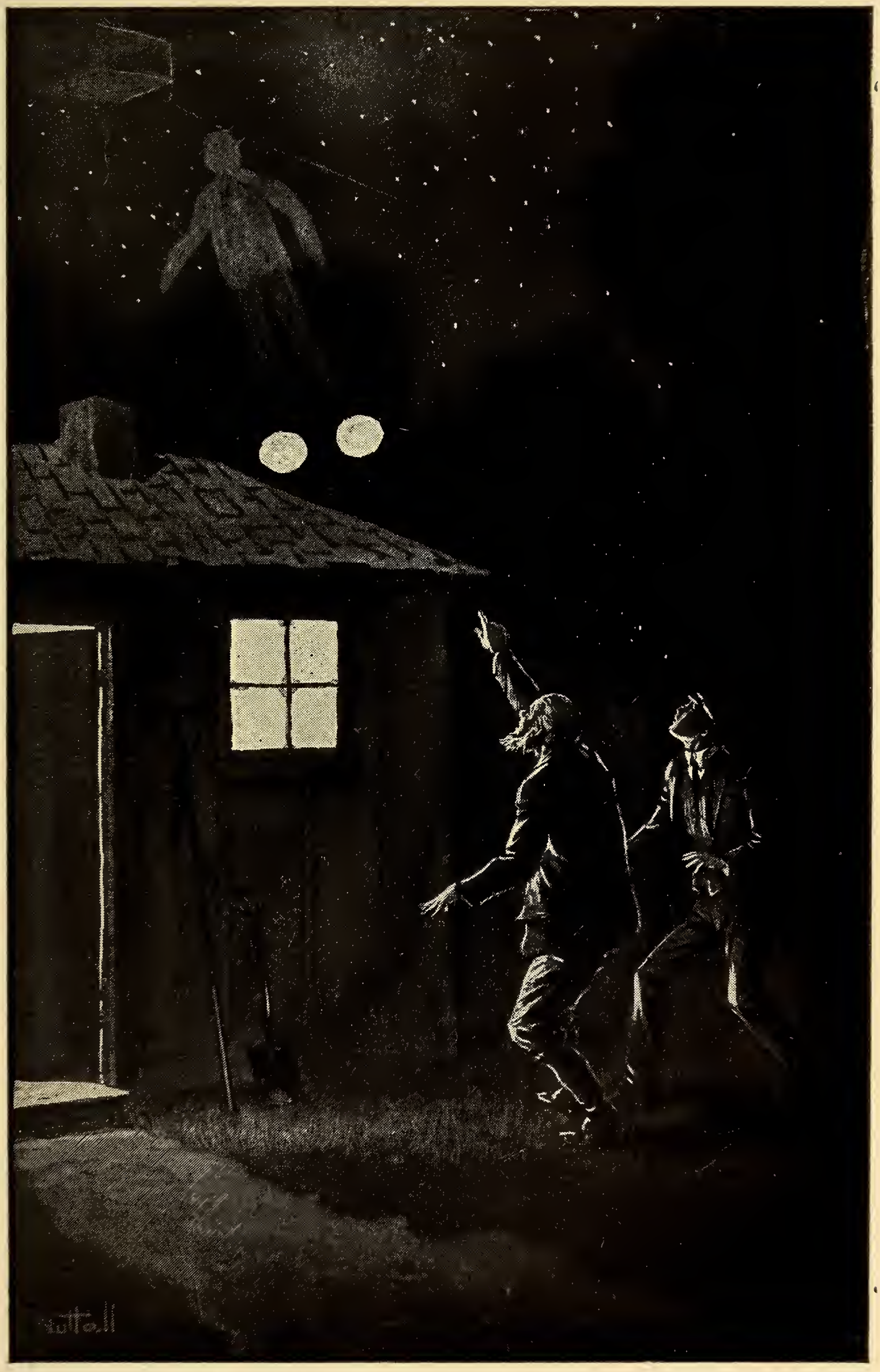
"Here he comes!" said Jerry in a low voice, and a moment later a small patch of light, which had indicated that Joffy had opened his door, became larger, as he threw wide the portal.

The boys groaned more weirdly than before.

"What is it—cats?" the conspirators in their place of hiding heard some one from within the hut ask old Joffy. They recognized Noddy Nixon's voice.

"I never knowed cats to be around here," replied the man as he stepped from his cabin. He looked all about, and, of course, could see nothing. Then he gazed up.

No sooner had he done so than he let out a



"OH! THE GHOST, THE GHOST!" SHOUTED JOFFY.—*Page* 111.

frightened yell, which drowned the noise of the groans.

"Look! See!" shouted Joffy, pointing upward. "It's a ghost! It's a ghost in the air over my cabin! It's come to haunt me! I'm a dead man! This is a warnin' to me! My days are numbered! Oh! the ghost! the ghost!"

Jerry gave the kite cord a yank, and the phosphorous-covered figure swayed weirdly high in the air.

"Oh, he's comin' after me!" screamed Joffy. "He's comin' to git me! Save me, Noddy, save me!"

Hardly able to keep up their groaning because of their laughter, the boys saw Noddy rush to the door. He looked up to where Joffy pointed, and he too saw the ghostly figure.

Jerry groaned in a blood-curdling manner, yanked the string until the strange figure danced again, and then in a hollow voice announced:

"Beware! Beware of the airship! Approach it not, or it will be your death. Beware! Beware!"

"Oh! oh! I'll never go near it agin! Never! never! Not the longest day I live and draw the breath of life! Good Mr. Ghost, please don't kill me this time, an' I'll be good! Please, please, good Mr. Ghost!"

Whether Joffy's words took what little nerve Noddy had, or whether the sight of the ghost-like figure scared him, the boys could not determine, but with a frightened yell the bully dashed from the cabin and started across the clearing for town.

Jerry rapidly pulled in on the cord, and the figure in the air, with the two red points dangling below it, seemed to be rushing down from the sky to attack the fleeing youth. Joffy saw it, and with a frightened scream he, too, took to his heels and disappeared into the darkness after Noddy.

"They'll never stop running until they get to the town," announced Jerry, as he gave a final series of groans, in which the boys joined. "I guess we've taught both of them a lesson they won't forget in a hurry," and he proceeded to reel in the kite cord, to haul down the lanterns and the dummy.

"It worked better than I thought it would," said Ned as the motor boys started for home in great glee at having played this trick on their mean enemies.

CHAPTER XIV

PROFESSOR SNODGRASS ON HAND

THE trick with the dummy and the box-kite proved very effective, as far as Sid Joffy was concerned. The boys heard later that he arrived in town all out of breath, and much frightened.

He told a queer tale of a flaming figure hovering over his cabin, and wanted some of the town police to go back to his hut and exorcise the spirit. But no one paid any attention to Joffy, as he was known as a worthless character. He was so frightened that he would not go back home, but remained in the village all night, sleeping under the hotel shed. Nor did he ever again approach the tent where the airship was being constructed.

As for Noddy, inquiries showed that he had left town for a few days, giving out that he had gone to visit relatives in the country. They did not realize how bitter the bully felt toward them, nor what he hoped to do in the future to injure them.

"I guess he caught on to the fact that we were at the bottom of the affair," suggested Jerry.

"Very likely he knew he'd be laughed at for running from a dummy figure, and so he sneaked away. Well, I'm not sorry. We'll soon want to try the *Comet,* and if he was around he might make trouble for us."

"That's so," agreed Ned.

"When do you think we'll be in shape for a trial flight, Jerry?" asked Bob.

"I don't know for sure. In a few days, I expect. We'll ask Mr. Glassford."

The boys were discussing the happenings of the previous night as they walked toward the big tent. They found the inventor busily engaged, having arrived before them. They asked when he thought the machine would be completed, and received the encouraging news that a few days more would see the finishing touches put on it.

"I'm going to change the propellers somewhat," said Mr. Glassford. "I've been doing some calculating, and I think with a three-bladed one, instead of two, as at present, we could make better progress. We must provide for going against as stiff a breeze as we're likely to encounter, and that is no small item, for with the large area of the gas bag for the air currents to act upon, it will need all the power of our motor to send the ship ahead at times. There is no use disguising the fact that a motor ship is at more of a disadvantage in a wind than is any other kind of a craft. However, with the planes, I hope to overcome many difficulties that now beset machines of this kind."

The boys soon busied themselves at their tasks on the construction of the *Comet,* for each one had certain allotted work to do, Mr. Glassford, in addition, laboring himself, overseeing what the lads did.

While they were all thus busily engaged, Jerry was aware of a dispute going on at the entrance to the tent. He heard the voice of Tom Johnson, the man hired to remain on guard, raised in protest against the approach of some one.

"I tell you that you can't go in!" exclaimed Tom. "They don't allow it. No one is allowed inside while they're working."

"I tell you I must go in. I want to see them on a very particular matter," was the reply.

"Is it that old nuisance, Sid Joffy, coming back to bother us?" asked Mr. Glassford. "If it is we'll have him arrested. I thought you said, Jerry, that you scared him so that he wouldn't come around again."

"And so I did. That isn't Joffy's voice. I think I know who it is. Wait a minute."

Jerry laid aside the work he was engaged upon, and strode toward the tent flap. As he approached he heard Johnson saying:

"If you try to go in I'll stop you."

"Don't you dare touch me!" was the indignant answer. "If you do—but excuse me, my dear man, just a moment now—don't stir, that's a good fellow. I'll have him off you in a minute. Don't stir, I beg of you, as you value——"

"Is it a snake?" cried the guard. "If it is take him off, quick! I'm terrible afraid of snakes!"

"No, it's not a snake; it is a most perfect specimen of a horse-fly. I have long desired to catch one. Stand perfectly still."

There was a little movement outside the tent. Jerry heard Johnson give a startled exclamation, and then he heard another voice triumphantly cry out:

"I have it! It is a very valuable specimen. I am a thousand times obliged to you."

Jerry threw back the tent flap, and saw standing beside Johnson a small man, with a very large pair of spectacles on; and the little man was carefully putting into a box a big, buzzing fly. Jerry knew, almost before he had left the tent, whom he was going to see. I presume my readers have already guessed who it was, but, if not, Jerry's excited exclamation will tell you.

"Professor Snodgrass!" he cried. "Where did you come from? I haven't seen you since you captured the horned toad in California."

"That's so, Jerry. It has been quite a while. But I was just fortunate enough to capture the most perfect specimen I have ever seen of a green horse-fly."

"I didn't know green horses were ever bothered with flies," remarked Jerry, a twinkle in his eyes, while he shook hands with the professor, an example which was followed by Ned and Bob, who came outside when they heard the mention of their scientific friend.

"Ah, Jerry, you will have your joke, I see. You know what I mean. But wait. There! now I have him safely put away," and the scientist thrust into a small box the protesting insect.

"Did you get that off me?" asked Johnson.

"I did, my man. You may consider that you have been a great aid to science to-day," added Uriah Snodgrass.

"I don't want to be so no more," retorted the man energetically. "If any more of the nasty flies gets on me I'll—I'll smash 'em—that's what I'll do."

"Please don't," begged the professor. "They are too valuable to kill. Save them for me."

"Were you looking for us?" asked Jerry.

"I was," replied Professor Snodgrass. "I happened to be in this part of the country, searching for a new variety of tree-toad I have heard about, and having a few hours to spare I called at your house, Jerry. Your mother was not at home, but the girl said you and your chums were down camping in this lot. Seems to me you have chosen rather a public place to go camping. And why you have such a large tent is more than I can imagine."

"We're not camping, professor."

"No? What are you doing, then?"

"We're building an airship."

"Building—an—airship!"

The professor's voice indicated his astonishment.

"That's what we are," went on Ned. "Come on in and see it. We've got it almost done. We'll have a trial flight soon."

"An airship! Building an airship!" repeated the scientist, as if unable to believe what he had heard.

He was led inside the tent. The big proportions of the *Comet* seemed to amaze him.

"It really is an airship," he said, as if, up to that moment, there had been some doubt about it.

"Of course it is, and we're going to take a long trip in it," went on Jerry. "What do you think of the idea?"

"Excellent! Most excellent!" cried the professor enthusiastically. "I hardly knew what to think at first, but it is most excellent. That is better than the motor boat or the automobile. You will be able to go where you please now. How did you come to think of it?"

Jerry related the outcome of their visit to the Broadlands carnival, telling of how they met Mr. Glassford. The inventor was introduced to the scientist, and they seemed to be on friendly terms at once.

"A trip through the air," mused the professor. "That is a great idea—a great idea. Most excellent. There, I have it!" he cried suddenly.

"What? Another green horse-fly?" asked Johnson, thrusting his head in through the tent flap.

"No!" exclaimed the professor. "Boys, I have an idea—an excellent idea. I will sail with you in your airship. I'll go with you in the interest of science—science and—and bugs. I'll write a volume on the insects of the upper air, and gather all the specimens I can for illustrations. My! but I'm glad I happened to come here to-day. I have a rare fly, and now comes the chance to do what I always wanted to—sail in the air!"

"You're just in time, then," said Jerry. "We are going to have a trial in about three days."

CHAPTER XV

THE MOTOR SHIP SAILS

THOUGH Jerry had told Professor Snodgrass that the *Comet* would have a trial flight in about three days, it was not until five had passed that all was in readiness. Almost at the last moment Mr. Glassford decided on changes which took some time to make.

However, the professor was in no hurry, if the boys were. He was a guest at Jerry's house, and his time was fully occupied in catching strange insects, or getting new specimens of old ones. For the professor was employed by a prominent museum to gather materials for exhibit and for experimental purposes. His latest exploit had been to accompany the boys on their trip to California, where he went in search of a horned toad, which he captured after considerable trouble.

"Well, professor, are you all ready for a flight through the air?" asked Jerry one evening.

"I think so. Why?"

"We are scheduled to make our first trial trip to-morrow. That is, if Mr. Glassford doesn't find something else that needs changing. I suppose you'll be on hand?"

"Oh, yes. I have had a new style of net made, with a very long handle, to enable me to reach out and capture any curious insects I may see in the upper regions. How high do you think you will go; two or three miles?"

"Mercy, Jerry, I hope you don't go as high as that!" exclaimed Mrs. Hopkins, who was listening to the talk."

"Don't worry, mother. We're not likely to go more than a few hundred feet in the trial."

"Oh, Jerry, I wish I had never consented to this. I am afraid something will happen."

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Hopkins," said Uriah Snodgrass. "There is really little danger with such a competent person as Mr. Glassford managing matters. It is practically impossible for the balloon to fall, with its gas bag and the planes in addition. That is a very novel combination."

"But they may get caught in the upper air, and not be able to get down."

"Then all we'd have to do would be to let out a little gas, mother. Oh, we have all emergencies provided for."

"I'm sure I hope so," murmured Jerry's mother.

"I shall be nervous until I hear that the ascent is safely made."

"Well, you'll know by this time to-morrow," said Jerry. "Now I think I'll go to bed. I want to get up early, for there'll probably be something unexpected to do at the last minute. How about you, professor?"

"I think I shall stay up a while yet. I want to get a new specimen of a lightning-bug I noticed in the garden. It was a rare kind, and I almost had one when a mosquito bit me and I had to let the lightning-bug go. But I shall catch it. I will be with you in the morning."

Jerry once more reassured his mother that there was no danger in what he and his chums were about to undertake, and then he retired.

There was a big crowd about the tent early the next morning, for news had spread that the *Comet* was to be "launched," if that is the proper term for floating an airship. Probably "floated" would be better.

"Well, is everything in good shape?" asked Jerry of Mr. Glassford, as he greeted the inventor in the canvas shelter.

"I think so. The motor seems to work perfectly. That was my greatest anxiety. I will now proceed to generate the gas necessary to completely fill the bag. I suppose all three of you boys are coming along?"

"Of course; and so is Professor Snodgrass."

"That will make a nice party, and we will not have to carry so much ballast. Just go over all the cords, see that none are tangled, and test the wire stays and the braces. We don't want any accident to happen."

The boys were a trifle nervous, now that the time was at hand for the great test. Would the airship rise? Would she sail through the upper atmosphere—or come down like a stone?

The big gas bag seemed to promise that at least they would go up, but whether they could advance, and whether the *Comet* would allow herself to be directed in response to the influences of her propellers and the rudders was another matter. Mr. Glassford was busy at the gas-generating machine. The long, cigar-shaped bag began to distend more and more. The frame of the ship quivered as the lifting power of the gas began to make itself felt. But for the weight of many bags of sand, attached to the lower part of the car, it might have risen right in the tent.

"Oh, it'll go up, all right," declared Bob earnestly.

"That's what it will!" exclaimed Andy Rush. "Gee, but I wish I was going!"

"Perhaps next time, Andy," spoke Jerry kindly to the little fellow. "It's too much of a risk yet."

Mr. Glassford hurried about, looking at the various parts. He seemed as nervous as did the boys. Outside could be heard the murmur of a vast throng.

"Well, I guess we may as well take it out of the tent," remarked the inventor at length, as he shut off the supply of gas and closed the valves. "Open the tent, men."

A number of helpers had been engaged, and these now busied themselves opening the whole front of the tent, which was so arranged that the airship could be easily taken out.

"Here they come!" yelled a score of voices as the blunt nose of the *Comet* was seen emerging from the tent. The lifting power of the gas was so great that even with all the ballast on, and men holding the motor ship down, it evinced a tendency to sail aloft.

"I guess we'll go up, all right," murmured Mr. Glassford, a hopeful look coming into his face. "Get ready, boys. Keep the crowd back, men. I don't want any one to get hurt."

The ship was now completely out of the tent. On all sides were heard murmurs of admiration.

"She's a dandy!" was the general opinion of the boys in the crowd, while the men could be heard speaking words of praise.

"Them motor boys do beat the Dutch!" exclaimed an old resident. "When they had them there motor cycles I thought that was about as fur as they'd go, but land o' Goshen, look at 'em now! About t' sail in th' air like eagles! Well, well, it's a great age!"

"That's a hot airship!" exclaimed Noddy Nixon to Jack Pender, one of his old-time cronies. "I'll bet it won't go up."

Little Andy Rush heard what the bully said.

"You wait and see," he said. "It'll beat your tin fly all to pieces."

"You mind your business," retorted Noddy, but he could not conceal his envy at the fine motor ship which the boys possessed. He disliked them more than ever.

"You wait here," Andy heard Noddy say in a low voice to Jack. "If that thing gets up in the air, maybe I can make it come down again. Wait for me."

"What are you going to do?" asked Jack in a whisper.

"You wait," was all Noddy replied. "I'll get even with 'em."

"I guess I'll keep my eye on you, Noddy Nixon," said Andy to himself. "You'll bear watching."

By this time the airship had been taken to a place whence it was decided to make the ascent. The crowd was finally induced to stand far enough back so that the men could get it in position. Mr. Glassford went all around it, looking for possible flaws. He seemed to find none.

"Get in, boys," he said in a low voice.

Jerry, Ned and Bob, with rather queer feelings, entered the car hanging from the *Comet.* The car was just off the ground, but by the way the big gas bag was tugging it would evidently shoot skyward as soon as the score of men holding it released their grip and some of the ballast was cast off.

"Now you, professor," called the inventor, and Uriah Snodgrass took his place in the main cabin.

Mr. Glassford climbed into the operating tower. He tested various wheels and levers. Then he gave a glance over the whole ship. There was a moment's silence, while those in the crowd looked anxiously on. Were they to see success or failure?

"Let go!" cried Mr. Glassford suddenly.

The men released their holds and leaped back.

An assistant pulled on a cord which released the necessary number of ballast bags.

Up into the air, like a frightened bird, shot the *Comet.* Up and up she went, while to the boys and the professor it seemed as if the earth, the crowd and all below them, suddenly dropped away. To them it was as if they were standing still and the earth was receding.

"There she goes!" cried the crowd, as if there was any doubt of it.

Up and up went the *Comet,* until it was five hundred feet above the ground. Then it seemed to come to a stop, for Mr. Glassford had so regulated the supply of gas and the weight that no great height would be attained.

Suddenly the stillness all about the ship was broken by the rattling exhaust as the motor started. The big propellers began to revolve, whirling around like streaks of light. Faster and faster they went.

"We're moving! We're moving!" cried Jerry, looking from a side window in the cabin down toward the earth.

"I thought we would," replied Mr. Glassford quietly.

He began to steer the ship. There was scarcely any wind, and the *Comet* moved from right to left at will. The inventor went around in a circle, and cut a figure eight above the heads of the crowd. Then he descended a little by tilting the elevation rudder, and when some cried out in fear that he was dropping upon their heads, he shifted a lever, and the balloon aeroplane shot upward again. It seemed to be under perfect control.

All at once, above the rattle of the motor was heard another sound. The cabin windows were open, and Jerry heard something whizz past his ear with a curious, singing tone.

"What's that?" cried Professor Snodgrass, who had not said a word since they started, seeming to take it all as a matter of course. "Is that a new kind of mosquito? I must catch it. Where is my net?"

"It sounded more like a bullet," said Ned.

"That's what it was," declared Jerry. "A bullet or a shot. Some one is firing at us!"

He looked down. There seemed to be some commotion in the crowd. They could hear shouting.

Then came another of those curious, whining, whizzing sounds. Jerry leaped to his feet.

"They're shooting at us, Mr. Glassford!" he cried.

At that moment the motor stopped, and the airship began to descend rapidly.

CHAPTER XVI

NODDY'S PLOT

INSTANTLY there was a commotion aboard the *Comet.* The boys started to their feet, and with fear in their eyes looked forward to where Mr. Glassford stood in the small pilot house. The airship continued to descend, but not so rapidly as before.

"Are we—is there any danger?" cried Jerry. "Shall I let go some of the ballast?"

"Not a bagful," replied the inventor calmly. "Nothing has happened. One of the chains operating the propellers has broken, and I stopped the motor before it could get tangled in the wheels. Then I let out a little gas to bring us down. We must make a descent, but there is nothing serious the matter. I can fix it in half an hour, and we can go up again."

"I thought some one had shot a hole in the gas bag," remarked Bob.

"Some one was certainly shooting at us," added

Ned. "Look down there. Something is the matter."

There did appear to be some trouble in that portion of the throng directly below the motor ship. Men were running about, and loud shouts continued to be heard.

"Maybe they're afraid we're falling," ventured Jerry.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Glassford. "I shall have to let a little more gas out. I used a rather strong mixture. But I think I can get down now by using the depression rudder and shifting the planes. That will save the gas."

"It doesn't seem right that any one should shoot at us," said Professor Snodgrass calmly, as if such a proceeding was even permissible.

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed Jerry. "If I find out who it was I'll make him sorry for it!"

"I think I can almost guess who it was," said Bob.

"You mean Noddy Nixon?" asked Ned, and the stout youth nodded an assent.

Professor Snodgrass was the calmest person aboard the motor ship. The little accident had more or less affected Mr. Glassford and the boys, and the sound of bullets flying uncomfortably close to the big gas bag had not decreased their nervousness. But the professor continued to survey the surrounding atmosphere in search of new kinds of insects. Mr. Glassford had shut the gas outlet and had so tilted the planes and rudder that the big ship was approaching the earth on a slant, not making very rapid progress.

"We'll land as gently as a feather," prophesied Bob as he looked over the side.

"That's my intention," replied Mr. Glassford with a smile. "It doesn't do to come down with a thump, you know. An airship, at best, as yet, is rather a delicate piece of machinery. I am sorry this accident happened, but it is better to discover the defects now than later."

The *Comet* was soon resting on the ground, ready hands catching hold of the retaining ropes and making them fast to stakes driven into the earth for that purpose, while bags of sand, that had been detached when the ascent was made, were again fastened on to make up for the weight of the travelers, who alighted amid the cheers of the throng.

"Well, ye done it," all right," cried an old man, as he tried to shake hands with Mr. Glassford, the boys and Professor Snodgrass all at the same time. "Land o' Goshen, but ye done it! I never thought ye would."

"Yes, we made a fairly successful flight," replied Mr. Glassford. "But for a slight accident we would have stayed up much longer."

"An accident!" exclaimed a tall youth, stepping forward. "Tell me about it, please. I'm a reporter from the Boston *Globe,* sent out here to get an account of this."

"One of the propeller transmission chains broke," said Mr. Glassford, and he proceeded to explain to the newspaper man what had happened.

Meanwhile, the motor boys were surrounded by an admiring throng. Some of their young acquaintances clearly regarded them as heroes of the very highest type. The boys' parents were amid the throng, but as soon as they learned that everything had gone off comparatively safely, they departed, for the crowd was increasing all the while.

Andy Rush pushed his way through the press of people and called to Jerry:

"Did any of the shot hit you?"

"Shot? Then some one was firing at us!" exclaimed Jerry. "Who was it, Andy?"

"Noddy Nixon!" replied the small chap. "He had a big airgun, and when you got up in the air he hid behind a tree and popped at you. I saw him, and I told him I'd tell you. Did he hit you?"

"No, but he came near it. Where is he?"

"Over there somewhere, I guess," and Andy pointed to a clump of trees.

"I'll settle his hash!" exclaimed Jerry, righteously wrathful. "Come on, fellows."

Professor Snodgrass had seen a new kind of bug as soon as he alighted from the car, and he was oblivious to everything else. Mr. Glassford was talking to the reporter, and in the eagerness to see the motor ship no one paid much attention to the three lads, who, led by Andy, started off to find the bully.

They caught sight of Noddy standing behind a big tree, and before he realized it the motor boys had surrounded him.

"Look here!" cried Jerry, "why did you shoot at us?"

"I didn't shoot at you."

"You did so!" cried Andy. "I saw you!"

"Aw, dry up!" exclaimed Noddy. "How could I shoot? I ain't got no gun."

"You haven't, eh? What's this?" asked Ned, suddenly pushing Noddy to one side and disclosing the fact that a powerful air-rifle was standing upright between the bully and the tree. Noddy had hoped that it would not be seen, as, after his dastardly trick, he had not dared to leave the grounds carrying the weapon.

For an instant following the discovery Noddy did not know what to say. Then he blurted out:

"That isn't mine! I didn't do any shooting with it."

Jerry, who was standing near the bully, caught hold of his hand. The fingers were black.

"I guess that's evidence enough," he said quietly. "Your hands are all black from handling lead shot, Noddy. We've got you with the goods!"

"And I saw him shoot," went on Andy. "I saw him aiming at you, and I yelled at him, but he wouldn't stop. He fired a couple of times, and I was just going after a constable to arrest him, when something seemed to happen to the airship, and the crowd began to yell. I thought sure he'd put a hole in you."

Jerry's face showed the anger he felt. The other boys, too, looked as if they would like to thrash Noddy.

"I—I didn't mean to shoot at you," whined the bully, seeing that he was fairly cornered. "I was shooting at some birds and—and—maybe the bullets went too close to you."

"I should think they did go too close," commented Ned. "You ought to be arrested for this."

"What did he do?" asked one of several men, who had approached the group of lads.

"He tried to puncture the balloon bag with his airgun, that's what he did," declared Andy. "I saw him. He's mad because this airship works, and his tin fly didn't."

"He ought to be sent to jail," declared one of the men, a long-time resident of Cresville. "It's a disgrace to the community to have such a fellow in it. Instead of feeling jealous that this ship worked he ought to be proud of the distinction that has come to our town. Where's a constable? We'll have him arrested!"

"Don't any of you try to arrest me!" cried Noddy savagely. "I'll shoot any one who touches me," and he caught up his air-rifle.

His threat was mere bravado, for he was too great a coward to attempt any such thing as that. But no one liked to run the risk of the gun going off, perhaps accidentally, in the hands of the now thoroughly frightened youth. So they made no move to molest him as he sneaked away.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried the man who had championed the cause of the motor boys. "If I see you around here when any more tests are going on I'll take you to the lockup myself."

"I wanted to get him arrested when I first saw what he was up to," went on Andy, "but when I yelled to the crowd about what he was doing, every one was so excited about you sailing along in the air that I couldn't make myself understood."

"I guess the crowd wasn't to blame, for if you talked as fast as you usually do when you're excited they couldn't make head or tail of what you said. But you're all right, Andy, even if you do use a little too much gasolene once in a while. We're much obliged to you. You can take a trip with us next time."

"Can I, really? That's the stuff—up in the air—among the clouds—beat the birds—sail with the wind—down again—up once more—over the hills——"

"Cut it out!" cried Ned. "You've done enough for one day, Andy. Now, boys, let's go back and see how Mr. Glassford is making out."

They found the inventor finishing his interview with the reporter, and soon the motor ship was back in the tent, from which the crowd was excluded.

Meanwhile, Noddy Nixon, filled with unreasoning wrath, both at the success of his rivals and over the fact that he had been discovered in his mean trick, was walking slowly through the fields, carrying his airgun. He did not notice a man approaching him, and was somewhat startled when the stranger remarked:

"Didn't I see you shooting at the airship?"

"N-no—I—I wasn't shooting," stammered Noddy, thinking the man was a constable sent after him.

"Oh, yes, you were," went on the man quietly. "I saw you," and he seemed so positive that Noddy did not deny it again. "But don't worry," the stranger continued. "I'm not going to inform on you. I presume you must have had some motive in trying to puncture the gas bag."

"I hate those fellows!" burst out Noddy. "They're enemies of mine, and are always making trouble for me," which was very far from the truth, as you readers who know Noddy of old can testify.

"Ah, then you haven't any love for them," went on the man.

"I guess not."

"I haven't, either," spoke the man vindictively.

"Why, do you know the motor boys?"

"No, but I have a very good reason to know that fellow Glassford, and, while of course I wouldn't want to see him or the boys hurt, I'd like to get even with him for what he did to me. That's why I was interested in your attempt to put a hole in the gas bag."

"I wish I had," muttered Noddy.

"So do I. But maybe we can get square with him in another way."

"How do you mean? What have you got against him?"

"Plenty. I used to work for Glassford, but he discharged me after stealing my plans for the airship—this same ship he sailed in to-day."

"Was that ship built on your plans?" asked Noddy quickly.

"It certainly was. I am the inventor of it, not Glassford. My name is Giles Hoswell."

"Why don't you sue him and make him give you back the plans?"

"Because I can't afford it. I am a poor man, and he evidently has plenty of money."

"Not much. Jerry Hopkins and his chums furnished the cash to build this airship."

"Yes, on my plans," went on Hoswell bitterly.

"Would you like to get your plans back?" asked Noddy.

"Of course, but what's the use talking about that? I don't stand any chance. I haven't any money."

"Can you prove that those plans are yours?"

"I certainly can."

"And if you could, do you suppose you could make him give up the airship?"

"I think so. But why do you ask?"

"Because I'm going to help you get your plans back and take the ship away from them!" exclaimed Noddy. "My father has plenty of money, and I know he'll aid you. Come with me. I'll get even with the motor boys this time, I guess." And chuckling with evil glee, Noddy led his new acquaintance over the fields.

CHAPTER XVII

A SUCCESSFUL FLIGHT

"WELL, boys," remarked Mr. Glassford as the flap of the tent was closed on the curious crowd that surged forward, "are you satisfied with the ship?"

"We sure are," answered Jerry. "It did better than I thought it would."

"Even if we did have an accident," added Ned.

"That accident was nothing," declared Mr. Glassford. "It showed that even when one does happen we are as safe in the upper air as we are on the earth. But I think I will change the propellers. I want to make them four-bladed. That will give us more power, and our motor will stand it. We can then navigate against a pretty strong wind."

"How long will it take?" asked Bob. "I'm anxious to go up again."

"About two days. Then we'll try another flight. I think we can take a little heavier load, too."

"Then can I go along?" asked Andy eagerly.

"You're not much of a load, but I guess you can go," spoke Jerry. "Well, I guess we can now call ourselves balloonists, aeroplanists or whatever is the proper title. We've made our first flight."

"And it won't be the last," added Ned. "This is better than any of the machines did at the Broadlands exhibition."

"I told you I could build a better ship than any they had there," remarked Mr. Glassford quietly. "Well, boys, suppose we get right to work on the new propellers."

They lost no time, and having the material on hand were able in two days to fit them to the shafts. The broken chain was mended, and the motor ship *Comet* was ready for another flight. No announcement was made of it, as they wished to avoid attracting a crowd, but the news spread in some manner—perhaps Andy Rush couldn't keep quiet about his part in it—and there was quite a gathering when once more the big machine shot toward the sky.

"This is—this is glorious!" cried Andy as he sat in the little cabin with the boys and watched the earth dropping away from beneath them.

"Now don't get excited and talk fast, or you might heat a journal bearing and set fire to the gas in the bag," cautioned Jerry. "You have to be careful aboard a motor ship, Andy."

"I will. But this is certainly great!"

Mr. Glassford now started the motor from the pilot tower where he was, and the *Comet* shot forward. It certainly went faster and better with the large propellers, and made fine progress against rather a stiff breeze. The ship was under perfect control, and Mr. Glassford was able to direct it up or down, to right or left, or around in big circles as suited his fancy.

"Marvelous! marvelous!" cried Professor Snodgrass. "It is wonderful what strides science is making these days. Now, if I could only see some of the rare insects which I know must live in the regions of the upper air I would be perfectly happy."

"There's some sort of a bug!" exclaimed Andy, pointing to a small black object sailing through the air. "Maybe that is a new kind."

Instantly the professor was all attention. He leaped to his feet, and with his small, long-handled net in readiness he watched the progress of the large insect.

"It is a new kind of June bug," he announced. "Very large, and with green and red wings. Oh, I must have that! It is worth considerable. No museum in America has one, and there are only a few specimens in Europe. It is rather late for June bugs to be flying, though. Could you put the ship a little more to the left, Mr. Glassford? I want to catch him."

"That's something new—using a big motor ship to catch a June bug," remarked the inventor with a smile. But he shifted the fish-tail rudder, and the *Comet* obediently swerved over closer to the big, humming June bug.

But the insect apparently did not like the strange, big white-winged creature that was coming so close, and it made a sudden dart upward.

"After it!" cried the professor. "I must have it!"

Mr. Glassford tilted the ascending rudder so as to pull the ship upward, and it answered instantly, shooting toward the sky on an angle of about twenty degrees. This time the bug did not change its course.

The professor hurried aft to a little cockpit, in which the motor was located. As he did so the bug shifted its course, and took a position just above, and a little ahead of the pilot house. There it remained, keeping up a speed equal to that of the *Comet.*

"Don't move, now! Don't frighten it! I'll have him in a minute!" cried the scientist, hurrying forward. He mounted to the top of the small pilot house, right under the elevation rudder, and then thrust out his long-handled net. He had the small cord bag almost over the flying June bug when something happened.

The net was whirled from the professor's grasp as if a giant had plucked it from him, and then it was sent over the side of the ship and down toward the earth. At the same instant there was a crash of wood, and the port propeller ceased revolving.

"What's happened?" cried Jerry excitedly.

"The professor got his net in the way of the flying blades," explained Mr. Glassford as he quickly shut off the motor to see what damage had been done.

"There goes the bug," said the scientist sorrowfully, as if that was all that mattered.

"Yes, and there goes your net," added Ned. "I hope it doesn't hit any one down on the earth. That's one disadvantage of living down there," he went on. "You're liable to be struck with things falling from airships."

"I—I hope I haven't damaged the craft," spoke the professor contritely when he realized what had happened.

"Nothing but what can easily be repaired," said

Mr. Glassford. "The net handle must have broken, and a piece of it has become wedged in the sprocket chain that operates the propeller. I will ungear that one, and we'll see what we can do by simply using the other. It will be a good test."

The inventor seemed to take advantage of every accident, the boys thought. He started the motor again, and though the ship did not make as much speed as before, it sailed along fairly well. The slight tendency to go around in a circle, caused by using only one propeller, was counterbalanced by changing some of the planes, and they made a flight of a mile or more, sailing in various directions.

"Now I want you boys to get acquainted with the mechanism," said Mr. Glassford. "You must take turns steering and managing the ship. Jerry, suppose you begin. Come up here in the pilot house and I'll initiate you."

Jerry's knowledge of an automobile stood him in good stead, though he found that the *Comet* answered her rudders much more readily and quickly than did the auto or a motor boat. When Jerry had been taught the use of all the wheels, levers and appliances, it was the turn of Ned and then of Bob.

While his chums were learning how to steer Jerry took a walk all around the craft. Then he peered over the side, thinking he saw something dangling underneath.

It was a rope, with a stake attached, and he bent over to haul it in. He had just accomplished this when he uttered a cry of dismay:

"There it goes!"

"What?" asked Bob, who was approaching.

"My pocketbook! It just dropped out of my pocket."

"Did you have much in it?"

"About a hundred and fifty dollars. I was going to pay some bills for mother after we came down."

"Too bad! Did you see where it landed?"

"No."

Nobody on the airship could do anything for Jerry. All were sorry over his loss.

"Maybe you'll get it back," said Mr. Glassford. "Did it have your name and address in it?"

"Yes. But I think it dropped in a woods. Nobody would be likely to find it there," returned the unfortunate youth.

They had been up in the air several hours now, and the thrill of skimming along almost on a level with the clouds was wonderful. They did not want to descend. Professor Snodgrass was not enjoying himself, however, as he saw many curious insects, and as he had no other net with him he could not catch any of the winged creatures.

"Can't you drop down, get my net, and come back again?" he asked.

"I think we'll go down, but I don't want to make another ascension until I have repaired the propeller," said Mr. Glassford. "Though I'm afraid we'd have quite a task to locate your net."

"Never mind, I have several more. I'll bring two along next time."

"But please don't get them twisted up in the propeller," begged Jerry.

"I'll not."

Mr. Glassford, who had resumed charge of the ship, now sent it down to the earth in a long slant. They had returned to a position over their tent, around which quite a crowd was now collected.

"It certainly is a great ship," commented Ned. "I wish there was another aero carnival. We could enter it, and I'll bet we could beat anything they had."

"There's going to be a big airship carnival next month, boys," said Andy Rush, who seemed to keep abreast of aeronautic matters. "I was reading about it last night."

"There is? Where?" asked Jerry.

"Out at Park Haven, Indiana. It's an inter-

State airship contest. It's going to be the biggest affair of the kind ever held, and there are several prizes offered."

"What's the matter with our entering the *Comet?*" asked Bob.

"Nothing, I guess," replied Jerry.

"I don't see why you can't," added Mr. Glassford. "We will have a chance before then to eliminate all the defects, I hope."

"Then let's do it!" cried Jerry eagerly. "We'll go in a race, and maybe we'll win."

"I don't see why we can't," observed Bob. "The *Comet* is a dandy."

"Well, boys, find out more particulars, and we'll consider it," said Mr. Glassford as he steered the ship down to a smooth place in front of the tent, after a most successful flight, in spite of the small accident.

Jerry and his chums went out on a long hunt for the lost pocketbook, but without success.

"Advertise for it," said Chunky. "I'd offer a reward."

"I will," said Jerry, and he was as good as his word.

CHAPTER XVIII

A PERILOUS TRIP

It did not take long to repair the propeller damaged by Professor Snodgrass, but Mr. Glassford, though the boys asked him to do so, did not make a trip the next day. He said he wanted to make some slight changes in the elevation rudder, and there were also some other small parts of the *Comet* that needed adjusting.

In the meanwhile, however, Andy Rush had found the paper in which he had read an account of the coming carnival at Park Haven, and the boys eagerly went over the details.

"Why, there are two main prizes," announced Jerry.

"Two? How's that?" asked Ned.

"One for the motor ship making the longest flight, and the other for the one remaining in the air the longest time."

"Maybe we can win both!" exclaimed Bob.

"Go on, don't be greedy!" was Ned's rebuke.

"But what are the conditions? Can dirigible balloons and aeroplanes enter?"

"It seems so from this," replied Jerry as he went over the conditions of the race. "Any kind of an airship, lighter or heavier than air, can compete. There are also prizes for the largest ship, and for the smallest, and for the oddest one."

"Noddy ought to have saved his *Firefly* for this exhibit," commented Professor Snodgrass, who had been told of the happenings at Broadlands.

"There's one machine queerer than his," said Ned. "That is Mr. Abernot's flying grasshopper. Maybe that will be out there."

"Well, let's get busy and see if we can enter our ship," proposed Jerry. "I'll write to the secretary of the committee that is in charge, and get some entry blanks."

"Good idea," remarked Bob. "I think I'll go home and get some lunch," for the boys were in the airship tent, where they spent most of their time.

"That's the first time I've heard Chunky mention eating since we got the motor ship fever," said Ned. "You must be getting tired of the *Comet,* Bob."

"I am not, but can't a fellow get hungry once in a while? I noticed you filling up on two ice cream sodas this morning, all right and ditto."

"Well, it was hot," pleaded Ned.

"Here, you two stop scrapping," commanded Jerry. "We don't want any hot air where there's so much hydrogen gas around."

A few days later, one or two successful flights having been made in the meanwhile, Jerry received an answer from the secretary of the Park Haven Aero Club, enclosing entry blanks. The motor boys, finding the conditions to their liking, lost no time in entering the *Comet* in the coming races.

"Now, if we're going in them," stipulated Mr. Glassford, "we want to win one prize, at least. I think we had better have a longer and higher experimental flight than any we have yet undertaken. What do you say?"

"Me for an all-day sojourn in the clouds!" cried Bob. "We'll take our dinner along, though," he added hastily, while his two chums laughed.

"Yes, I think it would be a good idea to take lunch with us," said Mr. Glassford. "We'll imagine we are on a long trip to win a prize, and we'll have a good chance to see how our ship behaves."

Two days later, having taken aboard what Ned and Jerry considered was entirely too much food, but which Bob declared was barely a sufficiency, the *Comet* made another ascension. Some changes had been made in the planes and rudder, and the good effect was at once noticeable. The ship could more readily be sent aloft or deflected toward the earth.

"I think I've got her pretty nearly right now," said Mr. Glassford. "She goes better than ever, for I have made improvements in my plans. Well, I'll send her up about a mile."

This was higher than the boys had ever been, and at first they experienced some difficulty in breathing. But they soon became used to the rarefied atmosphere, and then Mr. Glassford tilted the rudder still more.

"Going higher?" inquired Jerry.

"We might as well. I'd like to get above the clouds and see how she works in very thin air. There's a low stratum of vapor over there," and he pointed ahead of them. "Are you boys in any distress?"

"No, we can stand it," declared Bob. "Go ahead."

A little later the *Comet* was above the clouds, and looking down from the cabin windows the motor boys saw below them a fleecy mass of vapor that rolled and twisted this way and that, as the ship sped across its upper expanse.

"There's a bug!" suddenly exclaimed the professor, making a hasty grab for his net. He succeeded in extending it without accident, and a moment later he had captured a curious insect which seemed to give him great pleasure.

"My first specimen of insect life above the clouds!" he cried. "I shall devote a whole chapter to it in my new book, with a full-page drawing of it. This seems a very rare specimen. I never saw one like it down on the earth. It is most fortunate that you boys have this motor ship. It is destined to be a great help to the cause of science."

"Here are a lot more bugs," cried Ned, pointing to a cloud of insects that were hovering on his side of the ship.

"Where—where? Let me get at them!" cried the professor, putting away the first one he had caught. He extended his net and caught hundreds of specimens, for there was a small cloud of the things. He drew them close to him and peered at them through his large spectacles.

"Mosquitoes!" he exclaimed in great disgust. "Ordinary, common mosquitoes!"

"Kill them!" cried Bob. "If they're like any that bit me last night they'll bore a hole through the gas bag. Kill them, professor!"

But the scientist reversed his net and let the little pests go. He was more successful a little later, capturing what he said were some rare insects, but which the boys thought were the most common bugs. But, then, you see, they were not scientists.

The earth was now out of sight, and all that could be seen were masses of cloudy vapor. On and on sped the ship, the great propellers pulling it ahead at swift speed. Nor did a stiff breeze which they encountered high in the air serve to turn the *Comet* from her course. The ship was proceeding most successfully.

Several hours passed, and after a glance at the recording instruments, of which there were several in the pilot house, Mr. Glassford announced that they had traveled seventy-five miles.

"And in about two hours," added Bob. "That's great sailing."

"We'll do better than that," prophesied Mr. Glassford. "Here, Jerry, suppose you take charge a while. I'll come back in the cabin."

Not without a little feeling of nervousness did Jerry take his place in the pilot house. But he had profited by the lessons of the inventor, and soon, to show his control of the ship, he sent her up and down, and to right and left.

"Fine!" cried Mr. Glassford. "You'll do."

In turn Ned and Bob steered, but when it was suggested that Professor Snodgrass try his hand he balked.

"My business is to catch insects for science," he said. "I did enough damage when I disarranged the propeller. I'm not going to risk it again."

They had lunch high in the air, a most novel experience for them, though Bob was not affected by it and ate as heartily as if he was on the earth, according to his two chums.

"Well, we've made a hundred and fifty miles since we started," announced Mr. Glassford a little later. "I think that demonstrates what we can do. Suppose we turn back?"

"That suits me," said Jerry. "The folks may be worried about us."

Accordingly, the *Comet* was put about and headed for Cresville. The speed at once increased, as she had the benefit of a stiff breeze to aid her.

They had sped along for perhaps fifty miles when the billowy, white mass of clouds above which they were sailing gave place to a broad expanse of clear atmosphere. The brightly shining sun struck full upon them, and they could see the green earth spread out below.

"Ah, this is something like!" cried Bob. "This is fine! Eh, fellows?"

He had hardly spoken when they were all aware that the *Comet,* which had been proceeding along on the level, was shooting upward very swiftly. At the same moment Mr. Glassford uttered a cry, and the boys saw him rapidly turning a wheel valve.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry.

"The heat of the sun is expanding our gas and causing us to rise," explained the inventor. "I must let some out, as I don't want to go any higher."

But something seemed to be the matter. Mr. Glassford could not open the gas valve, and the motor ship continued to rise.

"I must try the deflecting rudder," he murmured. "Jerry, come and give me a hand."

Jerry hurried forward. The pressure on the oblong planes which constituted the deflecting rudder was very great. It required the combined strength of the inventor and Jerry to move the lever a slight distance. And it was only a slight distance that they could move it.

"Something is jammed!" exclaimed Mr. Glassford. "We can't move the rudder!"

"And we can't let the gas out," said Jerry in a low voice. "What's going to happen?"

"We'll have to go on up—until—until——"

Mr. Glassford did not finish.

"My head feels queer!" cried Bob, staggering about the cabin. "I feel dizzy." And before Ned, who was standing near him, could grasp his chum, Bob had fallen upon the floor of the car.

CHAPTER XIX

STARTING FOR THE RACE

"GO BACK to him, Jerry," cried Mr. Glassford, observing from the pilot house what had happened. "Tell him to swallow several mouthfuls of water. That will equalize the pressure on his ear-drums, which is what makes him feel so badly. We are up rather high, and still ascending."

Jerry and his chums had been told how to conduct themselves in case of emergency in high altitudes, and though when he reached the place where Bob was stretched out in great distress he found Ned about to succumb to the rarefied atmosphere, Jerry did not lose his head. He procured water from a tank, made both lads swallow some, and then, with the aid of Professor Snodgrass, administered a few simple remedies. Ned and Bob soon felt better.

Curiously enough, neither Jerry nor the professor were affected by the height to which the *Comet* had now shot. As for Mr. Glassford, he had made too many balloon ascensions to mind being a few miles up in the air. His principal anxiety was now regarding the mechanism of the motor ship.

Work as desperately as he did, and pull as hard as was safe on the lever that shifted the rudder controlling the height, nothing resulted from it. Nor could he open the valve that held the gas in the big bag.

"I've got to try some other means of getting down," declared Mr. Glassford.

"Maybe the sun will soon stop expanding the gas," ventured Bob, who was now feeling much better.

"Yes, that will happen shortly, as it is setting; but I must stop our upward flight more quickly than that."

"Why don't you stop the motor?" asked Ned.

"Because while we are in motion it rides on a more even keel, and is less subject to air currents. I must climb out forward and ungear the elevation rudder."

"Isn't that dangerous?" asked Jerry.

"Well, I've been in safer places, and I've done more risky things. I've got to take a chance."

Then, almost as suddenly as they had emerged into the open, sun-lit space, which was responsible for much of their trouble, the travelers found themselves enveloped in a mist.

"We're in the clouds again!" exclaimed Mr. Glassford. "That ought to put a stop to our rising."

He ran forward and looked at the instrument for indicating the height.

"Yes, we've stopped," he announced. "We're stationary, as far as going up or down is concerned."

"Bur-r-r-r!" exclaimed Bob with a shiver. "It's getting cold!"

It was very chilly, and they had brought along no wraps to protect them from the frostiness of the upper air. It had been ninety in the shade when they started from the earth.

"Go into the cabin," advised Mr. Glassford. "Shut the doors and windows. That will keep you somewhat warm."

"What are you going to do?" asked Jerry.

"I'm going to shift that rudder," announced the inventor firmly. "We've got to descend, and I don't dare risk meddling too much with the gas valve, for fear I will break it, and all the gas will rush out too quickly. I must have a duplicate valve for just such emergencies as this."

Jerry saw that it would be best to let Mr. Glassford manage things his own way, so with his two chums and Professor Snodgrass he retired to the main cabin, where, with doors and windows closed, there was some protection from the cold.

"Look!" cried Bob suddenly. "It's snowing!"

Sure enough, looking out of the windows they all saw a whirling cloud of white crystals, blowing this way and that as they sailed through them.

"A very common phenomenon," remarked the professor. "It is caused by moist air coming suddenly in contact with a cool stratum, which caused it to condense below the dew point, thus producing rain or snow, as the case may be. But if there aren't some new kind of insects! I must have them for my collection."

No danger was ever too great to deter the professor from collecting specimens. However, this time it was impossible to get them, as when he opened the door such a rush of cold air met him as caused him to turn back.

"One needs an overcoat here," he declared.

"I should say so," remarked Jerry.

"Well, I must risk it," went on the professor. "I simply must have those insects."

"You're too late," said Jerry. "We've passed them."

This was so, for the *Comet* had shot beyond the little cloud of creatures that were flying about in a snowstorm. The professor, with a sigh, gave up his plan and returned to the cabin window.

"We're going down!" cried Ned quickly. "Mr. Glassford must have fixed the rudder."

The airship was descending. In a little while they were sensible that it was much warmer, and they could open the cabin. They found the inventor in the pilot house, rubbing his hands to restore the circulation, which had been impeded by the cold.

"Are we all right?" asked Jerry.

"Fairly so. I can't operate the gas valve, but I think by deflecting the rudder sufficiently and by waiting until after sundown, we can reach the earth. The gas is rapidly cooling off. The rudder was jammed. I released it, and now it works all right."

"It's getting late," observed Bob. "Where are we?"

"About seventy miles from home," announced the inventor. "I think we'll get there some time to-night. I will speed up the motor as soon as we get a little lower."

They were now below the clouds, and they could see that the sun had set. It rapidly became darker, but Mr. Glassford had a compass and a good sense of direction, so he kept on, confident that he would reach Cresville. The stars came out overhead, and all below the travelers was blackness, with here and there lights showing as they passed over some village or city.

"We're about eight hundred feet above the earth now," announced Mr. Glassford after a pause. "I think we'll stay there until we get where we can make a landing."

"We might as well eat, I suppose," proposed Bob after a pause. "It's supper time, anyhow."

"I thought you were too frightened to eat," said Jerry.

"I was, but I'm over it now. I'll get the grub."

Chunky set out what was left of the provisions they had brought, and the food was very acceptable, Jerry taking some in spite of the fun he made of Bob.

Mr. Glassford speeded up the motor, and the *Comet* sailed along faster than before. It was about nine o'clock when they reached Cresville, and a landing was made without accident.

They found quite a crowd waiting for them, for it was known that they had gone off on a long trip, and when the ship was not back at the tent at dusk much alarm was felt. The boys found their parents in the throng, and though the lads made light of what had happened, they were very thankful to be safely back on earth again.

"Well, we've proved that we can make a long trip and get back in spite of accidents," said Mr. Glassford. "We'll soon be ready for the great race."

The next two weeks were spent in making some changes to the motor ship, providing duplicate gas valves and taking all the precautions to prevent a recurrence of the former troubles. A large gasolene tank was put aboard, to hold the fluid necessary to run the engine for many hundreds of miles.

"Well, I guess everything is in good shape," announced Mr. Glassford one day, following a rather long flight, when everything worked perfectly. "We'll ship the *Comet* to Park Haven tomorrow, and then we'll go there ourselves to take part in the great race."

"And I'll go along, too," announced Professor Snodgrass. "I haven't half enough insects for my collection yet, and I want more."

The next morning, the motor ship having been taken apart for transportation, it was sent on to Indiana, whither the boys, Mr. Glassford and Professor Snodgrass also went.

And though they did not know it, there followed them, on the next train, Noddy Nixon and Giles Hoswell.

CHAPTER XX

HELD UP

The boys and their two friends reached Park Haven at noon of a very warm day, and at once went to a hotel where they had engaged rooms. They found the city well filled with visitors, and on every side was heard talk concerning balloons and aeroplanes.

Park Haven was a large city, a junction place for several railroads, and located right on the edge of a stretch of level country which made an ideal place for airship trials. Not that all the contests would be limited to an area about the city, for it was hoped that some of the machines would sail many hundreds of miles.

"Well, we're here," announced Jerry, after he and his friends had made themselves comfortable. "Now, the next thing is to find out when our motor ship will arrive."

"That's it," put in Ned. "Let's go to the express office and inquire."

They found the express agent in anything but an amiable frame of mind, for so many articles were arriving, due to the holding of the carnival in the city, that he had more than he could attend to. He could give the boys no information about the *Comet,* but as it had been well packed they were not worried about it, and there was no special hurry, as the carnival would not formally open for several days.

They spent the next two days visiting scenes of interest in the city, and in going out to the carnival grounds, which were like those at Broadlands, only on a more elaborate scale.

One of the first persons they met was Morris Abernot, who greeted them with enthusiasm.

"Ah, you boys here, too," he said. "I am glad to see that you take an interest in aeronautics."

"We do more than take an interest in them," said Jerry. "We have an entry."

"No! You don't tell me! Well, I am very glad."

"I suppose you have your flying grasshopper here," suggested Ned.

"Indeed I have, and it is better than ever. I did not fly very far in it before, as one of the wings broke, but I have improved it, and I expect to win a prize. Excuse me now, I must go and see about it," and the little man hurried off.

"Every one who builds an airship seems to feel sure it will work, and that he will win a prize," remarked Ned. "I wonder if we are too confident?"

"Well, we know ours will fly," said Jerry. "Whether it will win a prize is another matter. I wish it would come. It's time it arrived."

"Let's go and make some more inquiries," suggested Bob.

"I don't like to bother that agent," said Ned. "He has so much to do that he's as cross as one bear and another one."

"Well, we've got to find out," announced Jerry. "Come on."

They found the agent seated at a desk, which was so thickly covered with papers that nothing could be seen of the desk itself.

"No, I don't know anything about your airship *Comet,*" fairly snapped the agent. "There's no use asking me. All the express and fast freight stuff is delayed. There's a *Meteor* missing, and a *Dog Star,* a *Cyclone,* a *North Wind* and a *Hurricane.* All of 'em airships—or what passes for 'em. I'll send out a tracer for yours. Come in the morning. Don't worry. You'll get it all right."

"Yes, but we want to have some practice before the race," said Jerry. "Well, do the best you can for us."

In the morning the boys learned that their motor ship would arrive that evening, and they felt much relieved. Mr. Glassford had not become worried, but had spent his time renewing his acquaintance with balloonists and airship men, who were now thronging into Park Haven.

As for Professor Snodgrass, he was at home in any place. Give him his insect net and not interfere with him, and he asked nothing better. He roamed about the city and out at the carnival grounds, making capture after capture.

The motor ship arrived that evening and Mr. Glassford had men in readiness to transport it to the grounds. A large tent had been set aside for the use of the owners of the *Comet,* this being included in their entry fee.

"We'll start putting it together in the morning," said Mr. Glassford, when the last box had been brought from the railroad station. "Then we'll have some trial trips. I hope it works as well here as it did in Cresville."

The next few days were strenuous ones, for it was no light task to assemble the airship, though Mr. Glassford hired several men to aid him and the boys. But at length it was once more together, looking as it had under the canvas at Cresville. All that remained was to inflate the big bag, and this Mr. Glassford at once arranged to do.

"She isn't damaged a particle," he said as he went over the machinery inch by inch. "She's as good as she was when we first made her. We can make a trip to-morrow. I'll generate gas all night to-night."

Meanwhile, exhibits were constantly arriving at the carnival grounds, and the place was beginning to assume a gala appearance, while from the explosions of motors in the various tents and buildings, as the inventors tried out their machines, it sounded as if a battle was in progress.

The boys hardly ate any breakfast the next morning, so eager were they to make another trip in their airship. They hurried down to the tent, where Mr. Glassford had remained all night, superintending the making of the gas.

"Is it all right?" asked Jerry eagerly.

"Seems to be," was the inventor's reply. "Are you ready to go up?"

"Whenever you are."

A little later, with Professor Snodgrass accompanying them, they made a flight. The scientist paid no attention to the plaudits of the crowd that eagerly gathered to see one of the first ships to attempt a flight. Mr. Snodgrass had no time for such matters. He was looking eagerly for a new kind of bug.

They made a flight of about two miles, ascending to a height of several hundred feet, but to Professor Snodgrass's great disappointment the only specimen he caught was a snapping bug, which he threw away in disgust, as he already had enough of them in his collection.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Glassford as he prepared to descend, "I guess we're in good shape for the race. We'll go all over the ship to-morrow, tighten her up and stiffen her a bit, and then we'll be ready for the word to start."

They made a beautiful descent, right in front of their tent, and soon the *Comet* was housed under the canvas. As Mr. Glassford, the professor and the boys were about to come away, leaving a watchman on guard, a man stepped up to Mr. Glassford, held out a paper, and asked:

"Are you Rupert Glassford?"

"That's my name."

"And are these boys Jerry Hopkins, Ned Slade and Bob Baker?"

"They are."

"Then I've come to serve this paper on you and them," announced the man, opening a document he carried.

"What sort of a paper is it?" asked the inventor. "We have paid our entrance fee, if that's what you want."

"This has nothing to do with an entrance fee. This is an injunction, issued by a court of Indiana, and is a document which prevents you, or any of these boys, from removing from the State, using, keeping possession of, or in any way having anything to do with certain property, to wit: one airship or dirigible balloon or aeroplane, known as the *Comet*. Is this it?"

"This is it," said Mr. Glassford slowly, "but I don't understand what you mean."

"I mean that there's an injunction out against you or these boys using that airship, and I'm a deputy sheriff sent to take possession of it."

"An injunction!" cried Jerry. "Who took it out?"

"Giles Hoswell."

"Giles Hoswell!" exclaimed Mr. Glassford. "Why, I know him!"

"Yes. He charges that this ship is built after plans designed by him, which you stole," went on the deputy sheriff. "He has asked the courts to protect him, and they will. You can't use this airship."

"But he has no right to get out an injunction," protested Mr. Glassford. "Those plans were mine. Hoswell only worked for me, and I discharged him because I found he was dishonest. He has not the slightest claim on this airship."

"That's a matter for the courts to settle," declared the deputy. "All I know is that I was told to serve this injunction on you, and I've done it. Then I take possession here, and you can't touch that airship without getting in contempt of court, which I wouldn't advise you to do. You must not touch this airship. I'm in possession, and you must leave this tent!"

"Did any one else besides Hoswell appear in getting out this injunction?" asked Jerry.

"Hum, let me see," replied the deputy, putting on his glasses and looking at the legal document. "Yes, there's another name mentioned."

"Whose is it?"

"Noddy Nixon. It seems he has an interest in the ship for money advanced to Hoswell."

"That explains it!" cried Jerry. "Noddy has done this. He is backing up Hoswell. He wants to prevent us going in the race."

"Boys, it looks as if we were held up," said Mr.

Glassford. "But don't worry. I will at once consult a lawyer, and we will see what can be done."

"An injunction against the airship," murmured Professor Snodgrass, when the meaning of what had just taken place was explained to him. "This is very unpleasant. But never mind, I——"

But the professor did not finish his sentence, for he saw a new kind of fly on the shoulder of the deputy sheriff, and he made a grab for it, much to that official's astonishment.

CHAPTER XXI

SEARCHING FOR EVIDENCE

As the boys, with Mr. Glassford and Professor Snodgrass, were leaving the tent, two figures entered. At the sight of one of them the inventor exclaimed:

"So, Giles Hoswell, this is your work, is it? This is how you repay my kindness to you."

"I don't know anything about your kindness," replied Hoswell stiffly, "but I know it was from my plans that this airship was built, that you stole them from me, and I intend to have my rights."

"You are saying what is not so!" burst out Mr. Glassford. "The only thing you ever planned was a steering lever, and I purchased all your interest in that, paying you well for it."

"We'll let the courts decide who is in the right," was Hoswell's reply. "In the meantime the injunction stands, and I warn you not to interfere with my property."

"Your property?"

"Yes, my property. I consider this airship mine, as it was built from my plans."

"This is in keeping with your conduct while you were with me," spoke Mr. Glassford bitterly. "I never could trust you, and I had to discharge you. Now you are taking an unfair advantage which the law gives you. But I will soon have my rights. This injunction will be vacated, and I would sue you for damages, only I know you have nothing. You know that these plans were mine."

"Then you'd better prove it."

"I intend to, and that very soon."

"All right; and, in the meanwhile, the ship stays here, Glassford," said Hoswell with a sneer.

"Yes, and I guess they won't take part in any race," added the figure which had followed Hoswell; and the motor boys, peering through the semi-darkness of the tent, saw Noddy Nixon.

"You had a hand in this, Noddy," remarked Jerry. "It's on a par with what you're always doing—something mean."

"Don't you talk that way to me!" cried Noddy angrily. "I'll complain to the court that you're making contempt."

"Oh, we are, eh?" asked Ned with a laugh. "Well, if there's anything more contemptible than you, I'd like to see it."

"Get out of here!" cried Noddy, his anger rising as he saw how the Cresville boys regarded him. "You haven't any right in this tent. Mr. Hoswell and I own this now."

"No, you don't! Nothing of the sort!" cried Jerry.

"You had better go," advised the deputy sheriff. "There must be no quarreling before the representative of the law, and I'm him."

"If any damage is done to this airship I will hold you, Hoswell and that Nixon chap responsible," said Mr. Glassford to the officer.

"No harm will come to it while I am in charge," replied the deputy. "Now you must go, and the court will settle this dispute. The case will be argued in two weeks."

"Two weeks!" cried Ned. "Why, the races will all be over then, and it will be too late——"

"Never mind," said Mr. Glassford quietly. "Come on, boys. I will see a lawyer at once, and find out what can be done. We are only losing time disputing with these persons."

"I guess we're as good as you are," retorted Noddy, but no one answered him.

The unexpected taking away of their airship was such a blow that the motor boys did not know what to think about it. They had had some experience with the law, and they knew the delay that might ensue, a delay which would prevent them taking part in the contests in the air. But, though Mr. Glassford was much annoyed by what had happened, he had a calm and confident air, and the boys felt better when they saw how he was taking it.

Professor Snodgrass had hurried on ahead to the hotel, as he had some specimens he wanted to preserve, and it is doubtful if he gave a second thought to the trouble his friends were in. This was not because he was not kind and sympathetic, but because his mind was engrossed with scientific matters.

The clerk of the hotel told Mr. Glassford that there was a lawyer in the building, and after a short search the legal gentleman was located. He readily agreed to take the case, and Mr. Glassford informed him of what had taken place.

"The first thing to do," said the lawyer, whose name was Alfred Morton, "is to find some one who can make an affidavit that the plans from which the ship was constructed are your own, and that this Hoswell had no part in them. Can you produce such evidence?"

"I think so," replied the inventor. "There was a man named Masterly, who was working for me at the time I drew these plans. He saw me draw them, and even made some of the blue-prints for me. That was before I ever knew Hoswell. Afterward I hired him, and both he and Masterly worked for me. Hoswell did make a suggestion for a certain lever, which I adopted, and I paid him well for it. That is all he ever had to do with the ship. I discharged him when I found him one day trying to steal some of my plans. Masterly was there at the time, and he can testify to that."

"Then the thing to do," said the lawyer, "is to find this Masterly. Where is he?"

"Well, now, that's hard to say," answered Mr. Glassford. "The last I heard of him he was working for a balloon-maker just outside of New York City."

"Do you think he would come here to testify?"

"I'm sure of it, if I could locate him, for he was very friendly to me."

"Then we'll send a telegram," decided Mr. Morton; and when he had obtained the address of the balloon-maker he despatched a message urging Masterly to come to Park Haven.

The motor boys and their friends did not pass a very pleasant night, for, in spite of the measures that had been taken, there was a possibility that the injunction would not be vacated, or rendered of no effect, until after the races, which were now only a few days off.

Their fears were increased, when, the next forenoon, a reply was received from the balloon manufacturer, stating that Masterly no longer worked for him, but had gone to a shop in Buffalo.

"Telegraph to Buffalo," said the lawyer briskly. "Your case all depends on Masterly, and he must be found."

But the message to Buffalo only brought an answer that Masterly was no longer there. It was suggested that the man might be in Chicago, and a telegram was sent there, but with no result. The last heard of Masterly, said the man who telegraphed back from Chicago, was that he was out in Denver.

"Say, I guess we'll have to give up," remarked Bob in discouraged tones.

"Never!" cried Jerry. "We'll wire to Denver."

"That's the way to talk," exclaimed the lawyer. "We have several days yet, and we may locate him in time."

They had to wait a whole day for a reply from

Denver, and when it came it seemed as fruitless as any of the others had been. The message stated:

"Last heard of Masterly he was with an airship inventor named Axtell. Don't know where Axtell is located."

"Well, we do seem to be up against it," remarked Jerry dubiously as he read the message a second time. "I wonder where in the world Axtell can be?"

"Did you ever know an airship man by that name?" the lawyer asked Mr. Glassford.

The inventor shook his head.

"There are so many in the business now," he said, "that it is impossible to keep track of them. Axtell—Axtell—no, I never heard the name before."

"Well," remarked the lawyer, "I don't see what can be done until you get hold of Masterly. Is there no one else who could give the evidence we need?"

"No one, I'm afraid."

"Say!" exclaimed Bob quickly, "I have an idea!"

"Can it; the weather's not good for keeping ideas," said Ned, half sarcastically.

"No, I mean it," went on the stout youth. "If you want to find Axtell, why don't you ask some of the exhibitors out at the grounds? There are a lot of airship men there, and maybe they know of him, or can tell us of some one who does."

"Bravo, Chunky!" cried Jerry. "That isn't a bad idea. I'll do it."

"I would say that was a very good suggestion," remarked Mr. Morton. "Some one at the grounds, where there are so many men interested in aeronautics, ought to be able to give us a clue. But wait; I have just thought of something. I will telephone to the secretary of the carnival, and he may be able to put us on the right track without the need of so many inquiries as would otherwise have to be made."

Mr. Morton lost no time in putting his idea into execution. He telephoned from his office, where the motor boys and their friends were, to the secretary of the carnival, asking for any information concerning Axtell or Masterly. Mr. Glassford and the boys could hear the clicking of the receiver, as the answer was returned.

"Good!" suddenly exclaimed the lawyer. "That's fine. We'll be right out there!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Glassford eagerly.

"Axtell is on the grounds now," explained the lawyer. "He has a ship entered in the contests, and his assistant is Masterly. We have found our man! Now to get him to make an affidavit, and we will have that injunction formally vacated!"

"Fine!" cried Jerry. "That's the best news we've heard in a year."

CHAPTER XXII

NODDY IS TRAPPED

"COME on!" cried Ned, when the little party, having left the lawyer's office, stood in the street. "This car goes out to the grounds."

"We'll do better than that," said Jerry. "Let's hire an auto. I wish we'd brought ours. We don't want to lose any time. There are some autos to hire just around the corner. One will hold us all."

"Good idea," said the lawyer, who accompanied the boys and Mr. Glassford. Professor Snodgrass was off somewhere hunting bugs and insects.

Seated in a speedy auto, which, however, the boys declared was not as good as theirs, they were soon hurrying to the carnival grounds.

Many more tents and buildings had been erected in the last few days, as more entries were received, and the place was now one of confusion, a big throng moving about, watching the preparations for the races, which were to take place in two days.

"Go to the secretary's office," directed Mr. Morton. "He can tell us where Axtell's ship is located."

The present employer of the much-wanted Masterly had a tent at the far end of the exhibition grounds, and thither the auto was directed. Mr. Glassford was the first one to leap out, and he saw, standing at the flap of the tent, a stout man with very black hair.

"Mr. Axtell?" he asked.

"That's my name."

"I'm looking for an old employee of mine named Masterly, who, I understand, works for you."

"Well, what of it? You can't go hiring him away from me at this late day. I need him to help me to get my ship in shape. I'm going to win the long distance prize."

"I don't want him to come and work for me," replied Mr. Glassford with a smile. "I merely want him to make a certain affidavit. I'm in trouble about my airship, and he is the only one who can help me out."

"That's different," declared Mr. Axtell, when the matter had been explained to him. "Go in and talk to Masterly. But he has a visitor already."

"A visitor? Who?" asked Jerry.

"I don't know. A young fellow. Came about half an hour ago. Said he wanted to see Masterly on very important business."

"May we go in?" asked Mr. Glassford, while a vague feeling of uneasiness seemed to come to Jerry and his chums. Who was the person now in the tent with Masterly?

"Yes—yes, go right in. I'm waiting here for a man I expect. If Masterly can be of any service to you, tell him I said he could take the rest of the day off. My ship is in pretty good shape now."

"Thank you," said Mr. Glassford as he passed inside, followed by the boys.

The most of the tent was occupied by a dirigible balloon, of a type that was somewhat common. The boys looked at it as they passed along, but they were too anxious to see Masterly to pay much attention to the airship.

As they advanced over the grass, which covered the ground on which the tent was erected, their footsteps making no sound, they heard talking in the rear of the big canvas shelter.

"I'll give you two hundred dollars to leave town," a voice was saying. "Two hundred dollars, merely for keeping quiet."

The voice startled Jerry and his chums. They had heard it before many times. Jerry raised his hand to indicate caution, and Mr. Glassford, Ned and Bob came to a halt. They were concealed from view by the big gas bag, but they could hear plainly.

"I'm not going to do it," they heard a voice answering the one that had spoken first. "I'm here, and I'm going to stay here. I haven't seen Mr. Glassford, but if he wants me to——"

"Hush!" exclaimed the other. "Not so loud."

"That's Masterly—the one who spoke before," said Mr. Glassford in a whisper.

"And the other is Noddy Nixon," said Jerry. "Let's see what he's up to."

They listened.

"You can't earn two hundred dollars any easier," went on Noddy. "All you have to do is to keep still. I'm paying you for your silence. That's easy. When the case comes up just skip out of town, and Mr. Hoswell will be able to prove that the plans are his. That's easy. Two hundred dollars just for not saying that the plans are Glassford's."

"But the plans are Mr. Glassford's!" exclaimed Masterly. "I saw him draw them. I helped make them. That Hoswell is a faker. He is no good."

"That's good evidence," whispered the lawyer to his clients. "We have caught him in the very act of bribing a witness. That's a serious offense."

"Then you won't take my offer?" asked Noddy.

"No, I'll not. Those plans are Mr. Glassford's. I haven't seen him in some years, and I don't know where he is now, but if he wants my evidence he can have it. I don't play any mean tricks like that—not for two hundred dollars."

"I'll make it three hundred!" said Noddy eagerly.

"No, not for three thousand! Now you clear out of here. I want to do my work. If Mr. Glassford was here I'd inform him of what you are trying to do."

"Mr. Glassford is here!" exclaimed the owner of that name, suddenly stepping from behind the gas bag. "Masterly, I'm glad to have heard you say what you did. I do need your testimony to defeat the plans of a scoundrel whom this young man backed up with his money."

"And I'll be glad to help you!" cried Masterly heartily, holding out his hand to his former employer. "I thought there was something queer about this fellow wanting to buy my silence."

"He'll find it more than queer," spoke the lawyer significantly. "I shall inform the court——"

But Noddy, with a quick motion, hurried from the tent, crawling under the canvas at the rear.

"Catch him!" cried Ned.

"Let him go," advised Jerry.

"He'll make more trouble for us," declared Bob.

"We'll be on the lookout," went on Jerry. "If he tries any more of his tricks I'll have him arrested."

"He could be taken into custody for what he has already done," said Mr. Morton, "but we must not waste time on him. If Mr. Masterly will come to my office I will draw up an affidavit, have him sign it, and then we will present it to the court. I have no doubt but that the injunction will then immediately be vacated, and you can resume control of your airship, Mr. Glassford."

"And maybe we won't be glad!" exclaimed Bob.

"Can you go with us, Mr. Masterly?" asked Jerry.

"Yes, if Mr. Axtell says so."

"That's all right," put in Mr. Axtell, entering the tent. "Go ahead, Masterly. Airship captains ought to help each other out, just as sea captains do. I'm glad my man can be of service to you, Mr. Glassford."

"Now to get rid of that injunction," said the lawyer, as the party, accompanied by Mr. Masterly, left the tent.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STOLEN LEVER

THE court proceedings, once Masterly had made his affidavit, in which he affirmed that the plans of the *Comet* belonged solely to Mr. Glassford, did not take long. The judge, after hearing Mr. Morton present his case, inquired whether there was anything to be said on the other side. But the lawyer whom Hoswell had hired, with money Noddy supplied, though notified to appear for his client, did not do so. Probably Hoswell knew how the case would go, and dropped it.

"I will vacate this injunction," announced the officer of the court.

"Does that mean we'll have to vacate the tent where the airship is?" asked Bob.

"No; it means that the order Hoswell got, forbidding us to touch our own motor ship, is null, void and of no effect or virtue," replied Jerry in a whisper. "Come on now, I want to see how the *Comet* looks."

"Well, you'll soon have that pleasure," said the lawyer. "You can go and take charge now. I will accompany you and serve this court order on the deputy sheriff. He will then leave you in possession. We may find Hoswell there. In case we shall, do you want to make any charge against him, Mr. Glassford?"

"I think not. Let him go. I want to give my whole attention to the coming race. I can't be bothered by that scoundrel."

But when they reached the tent they did not find the conspirator there. The deputy sheriff was asleep in the cabin of the *Comet,* where he had taken his position, very likely, to prevent the ship being removed without disturbing him.

The court order was shown him, and the deputy at once announced that his duties were at an end.

"I've kept your ship safe for you," he said. "It wasn't my fault that I had to take charge of it. Just look it over. There's not a thing happened to it."

"Where is Hoswell?" asked Mr. Glassford. "Has he been here lately?"

"He was here early this morning, but he left in a hurry after that fellow—what's his name?—Hixon or Dixon——"

"Nixon," supplied Ned.

"That's it—Nixon. Well, Hoswell left in a hurry when Nixon came here and told him something."

"I guess Noddy told him how the game was going," said Jerry, "and Hoswell skipped out. He probably knew we'd be along soon. But I wonder how Noddy came to locate Masterly?"

"Hoswell put him up to that," said Mr. Glassford. "I asked Masterly about it, and he said Noddy came to the tent, introduced himself, and made his bribery proposition, which we so fortunately overheard. Very likely Hoswell heard of Masterly's presence here and decided to try and get ahead of me. But he got a dose of his own medicine."

"I only hope he didn't damage the ship for revenge," remarked Ned. "It would be just like him, or Noddy, to try to break some part of it."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Glassford, an anxious look coming over his face. "We must make an examination."

With trained eyes and hands Mr. Glassford rapidly went over the ship. It seemed to be all right, and the boys were beginning to congratulate themselves that they could make a trip yet that day, when the inventor uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry quickly.

"The steering lever—the one that operates the elevation and depression planes—it's gone—it's been taken off!"

"Taken off?"

"Yes. It's quite complicated, and a very necessary part of the ship. Some one has removed it."

"Then it was Hoswell or Noddy," declared Jerry.

"Hoswell, more likely. Young Nixon wouldn't know how to take it off. It's the lever Hoswell gave me an idea for, and for which I paid him well."

"And now he's taken it for revenge!" exclaimed Ned. "What's to be done? We must make a new one at once."

"Easier said than done," replied Mr. Glassford. "That lever is quite a complicated piece of work, and it will take at least three days to construct a new one and get it in place."

"That will be too late for us to start in the great race," said Jerry solemnly. "Isn't there any other plan?"

"It doesn't look so," replied Mr. Glassford. "The ship will not steer well without the use of the elevation rudder, and I can't work that without the lever which Hoswell has stolen."

"Maybe we could find him and make him give it up," suggested Jerry. "If we could we might be able to get the ship ready in time."

"And if we don't, we can't," was Mr. Glassford's rather dubious answer.

"Why don't you try the railroad stations?" suggested the lawyer. "Most likely he'll try to get out of town as soon as possible. Could he carry this lever with him?"

"He could, but it's quite large, and I don't believe they'd let him take it into a passenger coach with him."

"Then he'd have to send it by express," went on the lawyer. "Make a tour of the express offices. Very little express goes out before night, and perhaps you can secure the lever. If you can locate it I will arrange the necessary legal papers to enable you to take possession of it."

"That's a good idea," declared Mr. Glassford. "Boys, we must make a tour of the express offices. Start at once. We have very little time left. If we don't find that lever we can't race."

"Then we'll find it!" exclaimed Jerry confidently.

But that night, after a wearying round of the different offices, the boys had to admit that they were nearly beaten. There was no record of the lever having been shipped, nor could they find any trace of Hoswell. There were a number of express offices in Park Haven, but the answer was the same at each one. Nothing like a lever had been received for shipment.

"And the airship must be ready by to-morrow for the race next day," said Jerry. "I don't see how we're going to do it. Can't you rig up some sort of an emergency lever, Mr. Glassford?"

"I wouldn't dare chance it. Never mind, we will have to make a new one. We can't have it in time for the great race, but we can give an exhibition and show the folks what the *Comet* can do."

"That won't be the race, though," said Jerry with a sigh. "I counted on winning one of the two prizes."

"So did I," replied the inventor, "but we can't do it."

They were much dispirited that night, and no one slept well. To-morrow was the last day for getting their ship ready, and they had to sign the final papers the night before the race, giving the official weights of the passengers, the power of their motor, and other details. Without the lever it would be useless to try and enter. Failure stared them in the face.

"Well, I suppose we might as well go to the grounds, and see the others making their final preparations," said Ned, the morning of the day before the race. "We're not in it, though, after all our work. I suppose Noddy is laughing at us, if he knows what a mean trick Hoswell played on us."

"Oh, you can depend upon it he knows about it," said Jerry. "If I catch him I'll punch his face good and proper."

"That won't find the lever," spoke Ned with a sigh.

"Say, why didn't we try some of the freight offices?" asked Bob suddenly. "Maybe Hoswell shipped the lever by freight, so as to fool us."

"Freight!" exclaimed Mr. Glassford.

"Freight!" cried Jerry. "That's it! Maybe he has. I wonder we didn't think of that before. Bob, you're all to the ice-cream cone!"

"We'll visit the freight offices at once," said Mr. Glassford. "There are only three of them, and it won't take long."

"We three fellows will attend to the searching part of it," proposed Jerry. "You stay at the hotel, Mr. Glassford, and whoever locates the lever will telephone to you. Then you can have the lawyer take whatever action is necessary to get it back."

"That's a good suggestion. Go ahead. I'll wait here for you."

It was Bob's luck to locate the lever at the very depot of the railroad over which the *Comet* had been shipped to Park Haven. The agent told Bob that a man answering Hoswell's description had left the lever for shipment the night of the day on which the injunction was vacated. It had been held at the depot because there was so much other freight to go out ahead of it.

Bob lost no time in telephoning the good news, and that noon Mr. Glassford got possession of the very necessary piece of machinery.

"Can we get the ship ready in time?" asked Jerry anxiously as they were all in the tent where the *Comet* swayed to and fro at her mooring ropes.

"We're going to make a big attempt," replied Mr. Glassford, removing his coat, preparatory to hard work.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THEY'RE OFF!"

THOUGH Hoswell, in removing the lever, had done no material damage to the ship, he had unscrewed so many bolts and nuts, and had made so many changes, that it was no small matter to get everything in proper shape in the limited time which remained.

But the boys and Mr. Glassford were earnest workers, and they had much at stake. They toiled with a will all the remainder of the day, and toward evening they saw success ahead of them.

"There, it's on!" announced the inventor as he stepped back to gaze at the work. "Now, boys, if you'll get busy and tighten up the stay and guy wires I'll arrange the gas-generating machine. We'll barely have time enough, as it is, to fill the bag."

"And we can't make any trial flight," said Jerry. "All the other machines had try-outs to-day."

"It's out of the question for us," responded Mr. Glassford. "But I have no fear of what the *Comet* will do. She has proved herself able to do wonders in the air, and though we may not win the race, we will make a good attempt. Now, boys, get busy."

It was late that afternoon when the inventor pronounced everything in good shape, save the generating of the gas, and this was proceeding as rapidly as possible.

"I think we can take a little rest now," said Mr. Glassford. "By the way, where is the professor? He is going along to-morrow, is he not?"

"I don't believe he'd miss it for anything," declared Jerry. "He said he was going, when I saw him early this morning."

"And where was that?"

"He was starting for a pond he had heard of, where he said he intended to catch a new species of pollywog—a kind with little horns on its head. But that was before we had located the lever. I don't know whether he is aware that we will start in the race as soon as possible to-morrow morning."

"We must tell him to-night, then. If you boys like you may go back to the hotel. Everything has been done here that can be done, and I will watch the gas machine. You might look up the professor."

As the boys were going toward their hotel, Ned, who was a little in advance, uttered an exclamation as he turned a corner.

"What's the matter?" asked Jerry. "Slip on a banana peel?"

"No, but I'm almost sure I saw Noddy Nixon dodge into that fruit store over there. It looked just like him."

"I thought he had left the city," observed Jerry. "I wish he would before the race."

"Why?" asked Bob.

"Because, Chunky, it makes me nervous to think of what trouble he might make."

"Oh, I don't believe he'll come within a mile of us," declared Ned. "He's too frightened. If that was him just then, he dodged like a scared rabbit."

"All the same, I'd feel easier if he was a few hundred miles away," went on Jerry.

"Why, what can he do?" inquired Bob.

"There's no telling. But I think I can arrange matters so as to get ahead of him. I'm glad Ned saw him. It puts us on our guard."

That evening Jerry was seen in conversation with the hotel detective at the inn where they stopped, and though Jerry said nothing to his chums of what he and the officer talked about, Bob and Ned heard the latter say, as their friend left him:

"I'll get you a good man, all right, and I'll have him on the grounds. If there's any funny work he'll stop it."

"That's what I want," replied Jerry.

The boys found Professor Snodgrass, prowling about the big corridor of the hotel, with an intent look on his face.

"Are you looking for any one, professor?" asked Ned.

"I am looking for a very rare species of moth that I saw flying about here a while ago," replied the scientist. "I had one specimen, but it was so small that it escaped through the meshes of my net. I went back to my room, made a net of a handkerchief, and now I expect to capture the moth. Only it seems to have flown away."

"Did you get any horned pollywogs?" asked Jerry.

"Not a one. I fished around in the pond all day, but I caught a new kind of dragon fly, so I am just as well pleased."

The professor was told to be on hand in the morning, and then, as they knew they had to be up early, the boys went to bed. Mr. Glassford came in about midnight, having left a man on guard in the airship tent.

After a hasty breakfast the little party, who soon expected to be sailing through the air, went to where the *Comet* was kept. They found the gas bag fully distended, and the big ship was tugging and swaying away, almost lifting the extra heavy ballast that had been attached to counterbalance the added lifting power of the gas.

"How about food?" asked Bob rather anxiously as he walked about the motor ship. "We're likely to be in the air for some time, aren't we?"

"If everything goes well we shall be," replied Mr. Glassford. "But the pantry is well stocked, Bob; don't worry."

"I won't, if that's the case," was Chunky's answer.

"How long a trip do you expect to make?" asked the professor, while his eyes roved about in search of any possible stray insect worth catching.

"Well, I hope to be up in the air at least two nights," said Mr. Glassford. "Of course, one can never tell exactly what is going to happen. You know there are two prizes of twenty-five hundred dollars each. One will be given the owners of the motor ship which remains up the greatest number of hours, and the other to the machine which travels the longest distance."

"Then there is a possibility of us getting both prizes, is there not?"

"A possibility, yes, but no probability, though I hope we will get one prize."

To be sure that nothing was lacking to make the trip a success, Mr. Glassford, aided by the boys, went over every inch of the motor ship, and tested the motor. It seemed to work well.

An extra supply of gasolene and water had been put on board, together with plentiful stores and supplies, the recording and measuring instruments, and everything that ingenuity or science could suggest to make the trip a success.

There were five other motor ships entered in the race. They were all forms of the dirigible balloon, of various shapes and sizes, but none had the aeroplane arrangement that the *Comet* possessed. Three of the airships were larger than the craft of the motor boys, and the remaining two were somewhat smaller. All were powerful machines, and in tests all had shown that they could go up to a great height and move with considerable speed in the air. Owing to Hoswell's action, the *Comet* had been tried only once at Park Haven, and aside from her owners, few felt that she would make much of a showing. The "favorite," if one may use such a term, was a large red balloon, and when Mr. Glassford saw it coming from the big tent, not far from where the *Comet* was sheltered, he shook his head rather dubiously.

"That's a fine machine," he said. "Her propellers look to be more powerful than ours, but I think we can do better if it comes on to blow, which it is very likely to do."

"Oh, we'll win," said Bob confidently.

Word was given for all six of the big balloons, that were to take part in the race which was to formally open the carnival, to prepare to start. Some had already left the sheltering sheds or tents, and now the *Comet's* nose was poked out.

She was buoyant, even with all the weight of ballast and the restraining hands of scores of men who volunteered to help lift the motor ship out and into position. The big gas bag tugged and swayed in the network of cords as if anxious to be free.

There was some little delay at the start, and Mr. Glassford took advantage of it to give the motor another test. The crowd leaped back in alarm as a series of sudden explosions sounded from the machine, and the big propellers revolved slowly, for the full speed gear was not thrown into place.

"I guess it'll do," said Mr. Glassford at length. "Now, I wish they'd start."

But it appeared that one of the ships had developed a small defect at the last moment, and it was announced that the start would be delayed an hour. Mr. Glassford and the boys entered the cabin of their motor ship and sat down.

All at once there was excited shouting off to their left. The crowd began to run in that direction.

"Something's happened!" exclaimed Bob, hurrying from the cabin.

"It does sound so," admitted Jerry.

The shouting came nearer. Then the crowd approached closer to the anchored *Comet*. A moment later something big and shining, with monstrous, flapping wings, and which emitted a sound like a battery of gatling guns in action, seemed to rush past the motor ship.

"It's a new animal! It's a wonderful new animal!" cried Professor Snodgrass, grasping his butterfly net. "I must have it for my collection."

The object, whatever it was, made a sudden change in its course, and came back toward the *Comet*. Bright metal wings could be seen flashing in the sun, and what looked like long steel legs or arms opened and shut, like the limbs of a kangaroo in full flight.

"It's Abernot's flying grasshopper!" cried Jerry. "He's trying it! Look, here he comes!"

Sure enough, that curious form of airship was approaching at full speed.

"He may run into us!" cried Mr. Glassford.

It did seem as if there was some danger, but just as the clumsy machine was within twenty-five feet of the *Comet* the motor, with a sob and moan, ceased working, and the flying grasshopper came to a stop. Then it could be seen that a man was seated just where the big wings were fastened to the body.

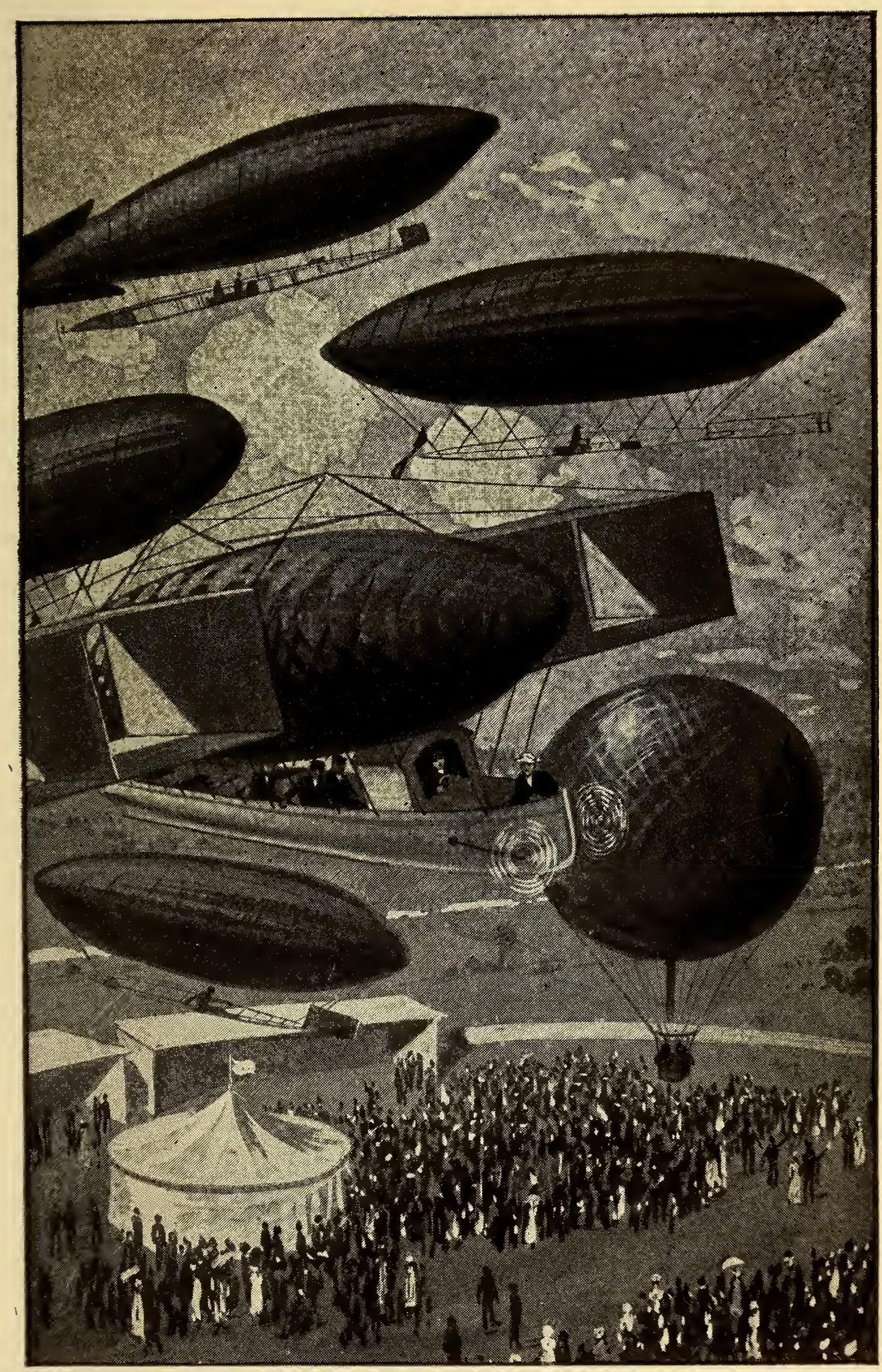
"Does it work, Mr. Abernot?" asked Jerry, calling to his friend.

"Well," replied the inventor dubiously, "the centrifugal plates are all that I could wish. The powerful springs in the legs seem to operate, but I can't understand why I didn't rise in the air. The wings are certainly large enough, and they vibrated very rapidly. I can't understand it."

"Perhaps your apparatus is too heavy," suggested Mr. Glassford.

"Maybe it is," agreed the inventor of the flying grasshopper machine, which, however, was more like a jumping frog. "I believe that's the trouble. I shall make my next one lighter."

He started the motor again, twisted the steering



“THE GREAT RACE WAS UNDER WAY.”—*Page 207.*

wheel, and the legs began to kick out. The machine carried its inventor over the ground in a series of surprising leaps, but, though the wings flapped harder than before, there was no "flying" to it.

"Another freak," murmured Jerry.

A man, sent from the committee in charge of the start, hurried up to announce that the repairs had been completed on the balloon which was the cause of the delay.

"Shall we go now?" asked Mr. Glassford.

"When you hear the pistol shot. It will be fired in five minutes."

Those five minutes seemed the longest that ever a watch ticked off, but they finally passed. Mr. Glassford had stationed a man at the rope, a pull on which would release all the ballast bags at once.

Crack!

Through the curiously still air sounded the revolver shot. The crowd, every person in which seemed to be holding his breath, gave vent to a shout. Six great bodies leaped from the earth.

"They're off!" yelled the throng, and then there came a perfect roar of cheers and applause that sounded like hail pattering on a tin roof.

The great race was under way.

CHAPTER XXV

NODDY GETS HIS DESERTS

SWIFT as the *Comet* shot from the earth, with that same curious sensation to those aboard of her that it was the ground dropping away, her speed was not so fast but that something which happened almost directly beneath it was seen by the motor boys. This was the sight of Noddy Nixon stepping forth from behind the corner of the tent and aiming a gun at the motor ship.

"He's shooting at us!" cried Bob, leaning out from the cabin window and gazing down.

A second later the spiteful "zip" of a leaden missile could be heard, as it shot past the car, narrowly missing the gas bag.

"He almost hit us!" cried Ned.

"That will be his last shot," said Jerry quietly.

"How do you know?" called back Mr. Glassford from the steering tower. Though it was some distance away, it was so quiet in the upper air that even a whisper could be heard the whole length of the ship.

"Because I arranged to have him taken care of," replied Jerry. "There! he's under arrest now."

As the travelers leaned over the edge of the car they saw a man rush out from the crowd and grab Noddy before he had time to fire again. The man caught the gun from the bully's hand and threw it far away. Then, with a firm hold on Noddy's collar, which he maintained in spite of the efforts of that youth to break away, the sneak who hoped to damage the airship was led away.

"That settles his hash," remarked Jerry. "He'll go to jail for a few weeks, at least."

"How did you manage it?" asked Ned.

"Well, when you saw him in the city yesterday I had a notion that he'd be up to something like this. I decided to take some precautions, so I spoke to the hotel detective. He arranged to have a private officer out on the grounds near our tent. He had a description of Noddy, and was instructed to arrest him if he saw him shooting at our gas bag. I didn't think Noddy would dare do it, but you see he did. Fortunately, the detective grabbed him before he could fire a second shot, or he might have damaged our ship considerably."

"It was a dastardly trick," commented Mr. Glassford, "and I am glad you got ahead of him, Jerry. I hope Noddy will get his deserts now.

Of course, our gas bag is in sections, and even if one was punctured we would still be able to manage, but I want all the power possible this trip, as I think we are going to have a close contest."

"Which machine do you fear the most?" asked Bob.

"That big red one. Its bag contains more gas than ours does, but I believe we have the more powerful airship. Well, I think we are now high enough to start the motor."

None of the ships had their propellers going as yet, since those in charge of them wished to attain a certain height and get in a favorable air current before moving forward.

No sooner, however, did Mr. Glassford start his motor than explosions began to sound from the other five craft. The big propellers of the *Comet* began to revolve, and the ship, feeling the influence of them, darted forward.

The conditions of the race were that the ships were to head, as nearly as possible, toward New Orleans. This was almost directly south of the place from where they had started. Of course, it was not expected that they would all reach the city of molasses fame, but that point was set at the farthest limit to which it was thought any machine would get.

In the steering tower Mr. Glassford listened with a critical ear to the song of the motor and other machinery of his craft.

"She's working like a daisy," he said enthusiastically. "If nothing happens, boys, we'll win one prize, anyhow."

It was a wonderful sight to see the great airships—six of them—high in the air, all headed in one direction. They looked like great birds, especially the *Comet,* with its broad white aeroplanes. Her pointed nose was headed almost south, as indicated by the compass, and Mr. Glassford, as engineer, gradually increased the speed of the motor.

At first the six ships were about on a line, moving forward together, and at about the same height. Then the big red one shot ahead, taking a place in the lead.

"Don't let her beat us," begged Bob.

"Don't worry," advised Mr. Glassford. "The race has only started. I can catch up if I want to. But I'm going a little higher. I think I can get into a swifter current of air."

He shifted the elevation rudder and the *Comet* darted toward the sky. One of the other ships started to follow, and then, whether the pilot changed his mind or whether he could not manage his craft, it had to drop back on a level with the other four.

Mr. Glassford's plan to go higher was soon demonstrated to be a good one. Without increasing the speed of the motor he slowly began to overhaul the red ship, as the *Comet* was in a swifter air current.

In the upper regions there are as many currents as there are in the ocean, and while at a certain level one may be moving slowly, a few hundred feet higher or lower there may be another moving twice as fast. The balloonist who can take advantage of these currents is much benefited, especially in a race.

But, though he nearly caught up to the big red airship, Mr. Glassford did not send his machine ahead, which he might easily have done had he increased the speed of the motor. But he wanted to be sparing of his gasolene; and, as he said, the race was only just started.

The other four ships were slightly in the rear, and they were all about in line.

After the first excitement of the start was over, the boys settled down to enjoy themselves. They were about a thousand feet high, and in spite of the sun there was a cool breeze. Below them the earth stretched out like a broad map. Park Haven was fast disappearing in the distance.

All the forenoon they sailed, keeping in about the same relative positions. Dinner was eaten at an elevation of a little over half a mile, as Mr. Glassford went up still higher in an endeavor to locate a better air current, in which he was not successful.

During the afternoon the red balloon increased her lead somewhat, and the boys looked a trifle anxiously at their pilot. Mr. Glassford, however, evinced no alarm.

"I guess you'd better take charge a while, Jerry," he said. "I want to adjust some of the recording instruments."

Jerry, trying to appear like a veteran, went to the steering tower, while his chums amused themselves by taking snapshots of the earth below them, with cameras they had brought along.

The afternoon passed, with the red ship still ahead, but Mr. Glassford would not increase the speed of his motor. It began to grow dusk, though it was not time for the sunset. A look to the west showed a big bank of clouds that had obscured the sun.

"I'm afraid we're in for a storm," remarked the inventor as he went toward the pilot house.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN A HEAVY STORM

"Do you apprehend any danger to the ship in case of a storm?" asked Professor Snodgrass, calling the question to Mr. Glassford, who was now in the pilot house.

"Oh, no," was the answer. "I expect we will meet with a storm or two before we finish. There are frequently storms in the upper air that do not get down to the earth. But the *Comet* is well built, and I am not afraid. I hope you are not, professor."

"Not in the least, but I was thinking that if there was a storm it might scatter the insects which I hope to capture to illustrate my book on bugs of the upper air."

"There are some kind of bugs over on this side, near my window, professor," called Bob.

"Some more mosquitoes, probably," remarked Jerry as he came back from the steering tower, where Mr. Glassford had relieved him.

"No, they've got funny little fuzzy things on their legs. They're not mosquitoes."

"Fuzzy things on their legs!" exclaimed the professor. "That is a very rare form of a katydid, which lives only in the upper air. I must catch some."

He hurried to where Bob was, carrying his long-handled net, and he soon caught more of the odd insects than he cared for. Some he preserved in small boxes, and the others he released.

It grew darker and darker as the clouds gathered, until it was difficult to see more than a few hundred feet away from the motor ship. Still Mr. Glassford pressed on, keeping his course due south.

"I can't see any of the other airships," remarked Ned, trying to peer through the gloom.

"Try the telescope," suggested the inventor, and the lad took a large one from the rack in the cabin. But even with the aid of the powerful glass there was nothing to be seen.

"Better close the cabin windows, light the lamps, and get ready for a bad night," said Mr. Glassford presently.

The boys did so, and soon, with lamps glowing in the cozy little cabin, even though they knew a bad storm was gathering, every one felt safer.

"I guess it must be supper-time," remarked Bob.

"Chunky tells by his stomach, not by the clock," commented Jerry. "All right, Bob, set out the repast, if you like."

The lad lost no time in complying, having constituted himself cook of the motor ship, and a simple but good meal was soon prepared on the gasolene stove.

"Ned, suppose you take charge in the pilot house while I eat," called Mr. Glassford down the little flight of stairs which led from the main cabin to the steering tower. "All you have to do is keep everything where I leave it, and maintain a course as near south as you can. We're making to the west some, as the wind is a little too strong for us, but by changing the angle of the planes we may overcome it a bit."

Ned, with some anxiety, went to the pilot house, but he had little to do, as most of the machinery was automatic, and he only had to watch the gages and occasionally move a lever or a wheel.

"We're still making a little too much west," said Mr. Glassford anxiously when he again took charge. "I think I'll change our elevation a trifle."

"Going up or down?" asked Ned.

"Down, I think. I don't care to be too high up when the storm breaks, as it looks as if it would very soon now."

Low mutterings of thunder and occasional flashings of lighning bore out this belief. There was no howling of the wind, as there is on earth in a storm, for the reason that the motor ship was being carried right along with the gale, being a part of it, so to speak, and it offered no resistance to the air current. Occasionally, when a cross current blew through the guy wires and gas bag net, there was a low moaning sound, not very cheerful to hear.

Mr. Glassford shifted the elevation rudder, and the ship at once poked her pointed nose toward the earth. It was now very dark, and nothing could be seen outside of the craft. Still, there was no fear of colliding with anything in the upper air, and the pilot might as well have closed his eyes, for all he could see ahead of him.

"Maybe we'll smash into the red balloon," suggested Bob. "It must be below and ahead of us."

"It's very hard to say where it is," remarked Jerry, "but I don't believe there's any danger of a collision. We're only a thousand feet high now," he added, looking at one of the registers in the cabin.

"Yes, and we're right over some city," added

Ned, opening a cabin window and thrusting his head out to take an observation. "I can see thousands of lights underneath us."

The other boys also looked, and saw below them what seemed to be millions of tiny fireflies, as they sparkle over a meadow on a June night. They were the lights of a large city, and doubtless the inhabitants of it, if they looked up and saw an illuminated body shooting across the heavens (for the lights of the motor ship could plainly be seen from below), imagined that it was a new style of comet, as, indeed, it was.

Then as Mr. Glassford again shifted the lever of the elevation rudder, the motor ship resumed an even keel and shot along about nine hundred feet above the earth. It was calmer at this elevation, and though the signs of the storm did not abate the travelers hoped they might escape the worst of it.

But the hope was a vain one. Half an hour later, when the boys were beginning to think of seeking their bunks, for they were very tired from the day of preparation, the ship suddenly lurched to one side. It was such a violent motion that Bob, who was walking across the cabin, was thrown into Jerry's lap, as he sat reading a paper.

"What's the matter?" cried Professor Snodgrass, looking up from some notes he was making concerning the latest insects he had captured. "Have we landed?"

"We're in a bad storm," called Mr. Glassford from the steering tower. "Jerry, you'll have to come here and help me. I can't manage everything at once."

Once more the ship tilted at an unpleasant angle, but Jerry managed to make his way to the pilot house.

"Change the planes!" cried Mr. Glassford, and he had to shout to make his voice heard above the noise of a counter current of wind that was now howling through the rigging of wires and wooden braces. "Shift them about four feet. That may put us on a level keel again," for the motor ship was now almost in the position of a sailing ship when she has nearly been thrown "on her beam-ends" by a heavy blow and the action of the waves.

Jerry shifted the handles manipulating the planes, while Mr. Glassford steered the ship to one side to take some of the wind pressure off the big areas of taut muslin. An instant later the *Comet* swung around and floated level. The worth of the aeroplanes had been quickly demonstrated. Without them the ship could not have been so easily managed.

On and on rushed the motor ship, the powerful propellers fairly pulling her through the air. They had left the lighted city far behind, and were now over what was probably open country, for there was no illumination.

Suddenly, with a fierceness that was appalling, the storm broke upon them. There came a dash of rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and the fury of the blast fairly bore the craft down.

"We're falling!" cried Ned as he looked at the hand of the elevation gage and noted that they were steadily approaching the earth.

"Keep cool!" called Jerry from the pilot house.

At the same instant the ship shot upward, for Mr. Glassford, realizing the danger, had shifted the lever to tilt the rudder, and the *Comet* began to ascend. But as they went higher the storm became worse, until they were right in the midst of it.

All at once the wind shifted, and instead of blowing from the northeast, so as to send the ship in a southeasterly direction, it blew from the east, full, driving the travelers to the west.

"That isn't the way we want to go," remarked Bob. "New Orleans doesn't lie in that direction."

"I guess we can't help ourselves," spoke Ned. "It's a bad storm."

Mr. Glassford tried to shift the planes, so as to counteract the changing wind, but he had little success.

"I think I'll go higher," he said to Jerry, who stood beside him in the pilot house. "We may be able to get above the storm."

He pulled the lever toward him. The ship again tilted her nose toward the heavens. The speed of the motor was increased, and the *Comet* fairly trembled throughout her whole frame. Anxiously did the travelers watch the compass to see if their course would be changed. Up and up shot the airship. Then, with a loud explosion, the motor stopped, and those in the *Comet* felt her falling rapidly.

"Something's broken!" cried Jerry as he hurried from the steering tower to the engine compartment.

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER A STRANGE BIRD

THE Comet was now at the mercy of the wind, as, the propellers no longer revolving, the motor ship had no steerage way. The craft was whirled and tossed about, and those in it, especially the boys, were much frightened.

"Don't be alarmed!" cried Mr. Glassford. "We can't possibly fall, and I'll soon have her before the wind again."

He quickly changed the elevation rudder, and so adjusted it as to send the ship downward on a long, slanting course. This gave the desired momentum, and the craft rode on a more even keel—if an airship has a keel.

"Ned, you come here and take charge of things," called Mr. Glassford, "while Jerry and I look at the motor."

Ned found little to do, save to keep steady the rudder which controlled the side motion of the ship. Meanwhile, Jerry was looking over the motor.

"I can't find anything wrong with it," he said as Mr. Glassford came up. "It seems to be all right."

"This isn't exactly like the engine in an automobile," said the inventor, "though it's nearer that in construction than anything else. Let me have a look."

Carefully he went over every part of it. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"I've found the trouble!" he cried.

"What is it?"

"One of the spark-plugs has broken, and it backfired. That was the explosion we heard. I'll soon have it fixed."

It did not take long to adjust the machinery. Meanwhile, the *Comet* was shooting downward at a rapid rate. In some alarm Jerry noted that they were now only a few hundred feet above the surface of the earth. Unless the depression rudder was soon shifted they would strike the ground and lose all possible chance at the prizes, to say nothing of perhaps damaging the ship.

"There!" cried Mr. Glassford at length. "Now I can start the motor. Jerry, tell Ned to change the elevation rudder. We will go up now."

An instant later the hum, throb and crackle of the machinery told that the propellers were in motion, and with a swoop like some great bird the *Comet* once more sailed upward toward the sky.

The storm had moderated somewhat, though it was still raining hard. This, however, did not bother the travelers, as their craft was snug and tight.

"We're doing a little better," announced Mr. Glassford as he glanced at the compass. "Not making so much west as we were, but still too much to enable us to reach New Orleans on this course. Now, I think you boys can turn in. I'll manage the ship. In fact, there is little to do."

"Call us at daylight," said Jerry. "We want to see how much country we've covered, and where we are."

"I will," promised the inventor.

Strange as it was to go to bed aboard an airship, the boys managed to fall asleep quickly. The only sound was that made by the machinery, and the occasional moan of the wind. Professor Snodgrass remained up quite late, classifying his specimens, and then he too sought his berth.

It was just getting light when Jerry awakened without having had to be called by Mr. Glassford. He got up, and his movements about the bunkroom aroused his chums.

"Where are we?" asked Ned.

"I haven't the least idea," replied Jerry. "We're still moving, however."

"Is the storm over?" inquired Bob.

"Seems to be," was Jerry's answer as he peered from a window. "Yes, the sun's coming up. Take a look—it's great."

Indeed, the rising sun, seen from an airship, with nothing to obstruct the view, is a magnificent sight, and one the boys had never witnessed before.

"Is everything all right?" asked Jerry as he went to the steering tower, where Mr. Glassford was still on duty.

"Yes; the night passed off very well. The ship is running very satisfactorily, and I think I'll let you take charge now, and get some sleep myself."

"I'm sure you need it," remarked Jerry. "Bob is getting breakfast."

"Trust him for that," said Mr. Glassford with a smile.

A look all around the horizon failed to show the presence of any other of the contesting airships, though of course the travelers did not know whether they were ahead of or behind their rivals. They hoped the former.

With Jerry in the pilot house the motor ship was sent along at rapid speed, while Ned and

Bob sat with Professor Snodgrass in the main cabin. The little scientist was keeping a lookout for any insects or birds that he might add to his collection. So far his trip had not been very profitable to him.

"What's that?" suddenly asked Ned, pointing to a small black speck off to the right.

"Maybe one of the airships," replied Bob.

"No, it's too small."

"Well, maybe it's a good way off."

"No, it isn't an airship," went on Ned. "But whatever it is, it's coming nearer."

"Get the telescope," suggested Bob.

Ned did so, and when he had focussed it on the speck he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"It's a bird—a strange bird!" he said.

"A bird!" repeated the professor. "It must be a rare sort of bird to be this high in the air. Let me take a look."

He made an observation, and at once became very much excited.

"I must capture that for my collection!" he cried. "I have long wished to possess a specimen of that kind, and now I have a chance to get it."

"I guess you'll have hard work," commented Ned. "It seems to be going away from us now."

"I will ask Mr. Glassford to take after it," said the scientist, hurrying toward the sleeping-cabin, where Mr. Glassford was.

The inventor, once he understood the request of the scientist, and learned that the bird was not too far off, agreed to change the course of the ship.

"We ought to work back to the right, anyhow," he said. "We must be many miles off our course."

Nearer and nearer the airship approached the bird. The winged creature, instead of being frightened, flew closer to the *Comet* as if to inspect it. Nearer and nearer the creature came. The professor was all excitement. With his longest-handled net he stood at an open window, ready to capture the rare specimen.

"A little more to the right, Jerry," called Ned.

Jerry shifted the steering lever. The *Comet* swooped toward the bird. The professor leaned out of the window with his net and made a sweep to entangle the bird in the meshes. But a sudden shift of the wind slightly altered the ship's level, and the next instant the scientist's body shot out of the window. The airship was more than a mile above the earth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RED BALLOON

"Catch him! Save him!" cried Bob.

Ned did not cry out, but he made a convulsive spring for the professor, just as he was disappearing.

Now, Nature had blessed the scientist with a pair of long legs, though she had made his body very short. Consequently, though his body was entirely out of the window, and his head was hanging down toward the earth, his feet had not yet passed over the sill. This Ned saw, and he took advantage of it like a flash.

He grabbed the professor's ankles with all his strength and threw himself backward to counteract the effect of the pull caused by the involuntary tumble of the little man.

"Grab me, Bob!" cried Ned, and his chum had presence of mind enough to do as he was told without stopping to ask why.

The result was that the professor was caught just in time, and the grips of the two sturdy youths prevented him from falling. But they could not pull him in, as his loose trousers had caught on the sill. All they could do was to hold him there while Jerry, all unconscious of what had happened, was in the steering tower, sending the ship ahead at great speed.

"Help!" cried Bob.

The professor had uttered no sound. Probably he was too frightened. Mr. Glassford heard the cry, and rushed from the sleeping-cabin, half dressed. He saw what had happened, and adding his strength to that of the boys, the poor professor was soon pulled inside the cabin. His face was red, for much blood had run to his head, but otherwise he was calm and collected.

"Look out for the handle of my net," he said as he stood in the cabin and began to haul in his apparatus for catching specimens.

"What, didn't you drop your net?" asked Ned in great astonishment.

"And lose that valuable bird?" inquired the professor. "I guess not. I caught it, all right, and have it safe in the net. Here it is."

He continued to pull the net in, and a moment later showed to his audience a curious bird, with brilliant plumage. The little creature was entangled in the meshes of the net, but the scientist carefully disentangled it, and placed the bird in a small cage.

"That will be a most valuable addition to my collection," he said. "It is worth all this trip has cost me."

"But, my dear sir, you might have met a horrible death!" exclaimed Mr. Glassford.

"I didn't, though," retorted the professor with a calm smile. "'A miss is as good as a mile,' you know."

"Don't take any more misses like that," urged the inventor.

"I probably won't see any more birds like this one," was what the scientist replied.

Breakfast was served at a mile and a quarter above the earth, Mr. Glassford having decided to go higher in search of a different current that would carry the *Comet* in a more southerly direction. The upper regions, however, did not seem to furnish what he wanted, and after sailing along for several miles he decided to drop back toward the earth again. Accordingly, the depression rudder was set, and the pointed nose of the motor ship was aimed at *terra firma*.

They ran into a bank of white, fleecy clouds, and for a time nothing could be seen but them, for the travelers were enveloped as in a dense fog. Then they dropped through that, and saw spread out below them a big open stretch of country.

But something else was also below them. The three boys, who were in the cabin, all saw it at once, and their cry attracted the attention of Mr. Glassford.

"The red balloon!" cried Jerry. "It's the red balloon from Park Haven! It's ahead of us! Let's race it, Mr. Glassford."

The inventor was not at all unwilling to try conclusions with his rival, especially since a whole day had passed and the red airship was still ahead. It was time for the *Comet* to show what she could do.

The ship was sent down until it was about on a level with the red balloon. Then Mr. Glassford speeded up the motor to overtake his rival, that was over a mile ahead.

The boys took turns watching it through the telescope, and they could note that the four men on the red craft were also observing them through glasses.

"Do you think we can beat them?" asked Bob anxiously.

"We've got to," replied Jerry. "Leave it to Mr. Glassford."

The inventor soon sent for Jerry to aid him in the steering tower, and the two were kept busy manipulating the wheels and levers.

"I think I'll go up a trifle," announced Mr. Glassford, when at the end of half an hour of speeding they had gained little if anything on the red machine. "There is a slight contrary wind at this level."

Once more the motor craft ascended. The wisdom of this was at once apparent. Aided by a stiff breeze, blowing in the same direction as that in which the *Comet* was sailing, she rapidly began to overhaul the red balloon. But the pilot of that was evidently an old hand at the game. He too sent his craft up until it was on a level with the *Comet.* But the latter maintained her advantage, and even increased it, until, that afternoon, the red balloon was only a quarter of a mile ahead.

"Can we beat them?" asked Jerry anxiously.

Mr. Glassford nodded.

"I haven't run the motor to the limit yet," he said, "and I fancy they have. I'll pass them at dusk."

Mr. Glassford made good his boast. All that afternoon he was slowly creeping up on the red balloon, though the crew of it made strenuous efforts to increase their lead. The inventor of the *Comet* did not want to speed his motor too much during the heat of the day, as it was air-cooled, and had no water jacket. But as soon as the sun began to decline and it became cooler, he opened it up, and with an increase in the explosions that made it seem as if the *Comet* was saluting her rival, the motor ship passed the red airship, being several hundred feet above her in the air.

As the motor boys and their friends passed they heard a faint cheer from those below them. They sent back an answering one and continued on.

"Now there's nothing to stop us from winning the race," declared Ned.

"Only the fact that there might still be another airship ahead of us," said Mr. Glassford. "There is no telling about that. One of the other contestants may have outstripped the red balloon."

The boys had to admit that this might be so, but in their hearts they hoped that it was not the case. For they did want the honor of winning at least one prize, while Bob made no secret of his desire to see both captured.

As night settled down, with the *Comet* some distance ahead of her nearest rival, there sprang up a stiff wind.

"That's not what we want," observed Mr. Glassford with a dubious shake of his head.

"Why?" asked Ned.

"Because it's forcing us to the west again. I don't see how we can reach New Orleans at this rate."

On and on they sped, over mountains and valleys—on and on through the silent night. Ned, Bob and Jerry took turns in the steering tower, so Mr. Glassford could get some rest. On and on rushed the big motor ship, her propellers ceaselessly revolving, and pulling her farther and farther on her course. Only the wind was still contrary, and was forcing them too much to the west.

It was just getting daylight when Jerry awoke with a start. There was a peculiar odor in the air about them. He sniffed vigorously for a second or two, and then leaping from his berth he aroused Mr. Glassford.

"I think something has happened," he said as quietly as he could. "It smells as if the gas was escaping."

"It is!" cried the inventor, as he noticed the peculiar odor. "There is a leak in the gas bag. We must stop it. I hope it is not a large one."

CHAPTER XXIX

OVER THE MISSISSIPPI

"WHO is in the pilot house?" asked Mr. Glassford.

"Ned is steering."

"Tell him to turn the craft about. We'll go against the wind a bit, until I see what damage has been done. You come with me, Jerry; I may need your help."

Jerry and Mr. Glassford climbed up to a long, narrow platform, suspended above the roof of the cabin of the airship, and held up by cords attached to the net holding the gas bag. Then they walked along, inspecting the vapor container for signs of a hole.

"I've found it!" cried Jerry. "Here it is. My, but that's a strong gas!"

"Yes, don't breathe it," cautioned Mr. Glassford. "It is quite poisonous, though comparatively harmless in the open air. I'll see if I can't mend the tear."

But it proved to be a larger one than could be repaired with the facilities at hand. It seemed to have been made by some object being fired through the material of which the bag was made, and at first Jerry was inclined to think that it was caused by one of the bullets from Noddy's airgun. But a closer inspection by Mr. Glassford showed that a nut had come loose from one of the iron braces of the port propeller. The propeller had evidently whirled it with great force against the thin material, tearing quite a rent in it.

"Well, we'll have to lose part of our gas," admitted Mr. Glassford as he told Jerry to descend.

"Will it cause us to descend much?"

"Not a great deal. I can throw overboard some of the sand ballast, and we will have about the same buoyancy as we had before."

There was nothing else to do save to let the gas escape. Mr. Glassford opened some of the bags of sand and allowed the contents to run out. The effect was to keep the motor ship about at the same level.

"It seems to be going along as well as ever," said Jerry. "You were wise to divide the gas bag into sections."

The *Comet* continued to speed on. There was now no sight of any of the competing airships, and our friends were hoping that they had left them behind. One thing worried them, however—the fact that the wind was still bearing them westward.

It was about noon when Ned, who was looking from the cabin window, uttered a cry.

"We're approaching a big body of water," he said. "I can see it sparkling below."

"That's a river, and it's a mighty big one," said Jerry, coming to the window and looking down. "I must tell Mr. Glassford. Perhaps it will give him his bearings."

But the inventor had already seen the stream. As Jerry had said, it was a very wide one.

"That's the Mississippi River," declared Mr. Glassford. "Now I know where we are, but just how far south I can't say. I think I'll drop down a bit, and perhaps we can get some information."

"Can't we drop some messages, too?" asked Jerry. "I think the folks at home will be anxious about us. Let's write some messages containing a request that whoever picks them up should report us."

"A good idea," declared the inventor. "Write your messages, boys, and I'll send the motor ship as close to the earth as is safe. But I'll not do it until we cross the river. I have no desire for a bath now."

The airship, deflected by the depressed rudder, went lower and lower. As the travelers came closer the river loomed larger and larger, until they could make out boats upon it. Then they saw a large city, slightly to the south.

"Let's cross that," suggested Ned. "We can find out where we are, then."

The *Comet* was headed right across the city, and as it approached lower and nearer to it the travelers could see people running about the streets in great excitement and pointing upward.

"Take the telescope and see if you can make out the names on any of the buildings," suggested Mr. Glassford, and Ned did so.

"It's Vicksburg!" he cried. "I see the name 'Vicksburg National Bank.' "

"I did not think we were so far south as that," remarked Mr. Glassford. "If we don't look out we'll be over the Gulf of Mexico. Better drop your messages, boys."

The telegrams, with a note of explanation, had been encased in light wooden cylinders, with ribbons attached. As the motor ship passed over the center of the city the boys dropped their messages. They could see the people running after them, waving their hands, and shouting, but they could distinguish no words.

"We'll go up now," observed the inventor; and while a vast concourse of people gazed upward at the strange sight, the *Comet* was headed upward.

A little later it was sailing over the broad Mississippi River, and the travelers in the air crossed from the State of Mississippi to that of Louisiana.

They continued to go up for some time, and then Mr. Glassford, desiring to make as long a flight as possible, now that it was impossible to land at New Orleans, steered due west, intending to cross over into Texas if possible.

"We must make as long a flight as we can," he explained, "and if we go much farther south we'll be over the Gulf. Our ship is behaving admirably, and there is no reason why we cannot cover part of Texas."

"Have we gasolene enough?" asked Jerry.

"Enough for about six hundred miles yet, and that will just about do it," said the inventor.

CHAPTER XXX

WINNING THE PRIZES—CONCLUSION

AIDED by a favorable wind, the *Comet* sailed on and on. Mr. Glassford was now running the motor to the limit of speed, as he wanted to cover as much ground as possible, and he knew that his gas would not last much longer and that his gasolene was getting low.

"We made two hundred and fifty miles to-day," he announced one evening to the boys. "If we do as well to-morrow we shall have almost crossed Texas."

After breakfast the next morning, Mr. Glassford made an inspection of various gages and registering instruments, and then came into the cabin. Jerry was in the tower, steering.

"Well, boys," said the inventor. "I think we'll land pretty soon."

"Why?" asked Ned.

"Because we're on the last pint of gasolene. I shall be content to drop down now. I think we have gone over a large extent of territory."

There came a sort of gasp from the motor. The explosion suddenly ceased. Mr. Glassford hurried to the pilot house, but before he reached it Jerry called out:

"Gasolene's gone. I guess we'll have to go down, Mr. Glassford."

"Wait a minute. Don't open the gas valves, Jerry."

"Why not?"

"Because there's a good stiff breeze, and it will carry us several miles yet. We want to make all the distance we can."

Her own motive power having given out, the *Comet* was now carried forward by the wind. The motor ship proved a good craft, even under these conditions, but toward afternoon the wind died away, and after taking an observation through the telescope and seeing a good-sized town a few miles ahead, Mr. Glassford depressed the elevation rudder and opened the gas valves.

Down, down, down, on a long slant, started the airship, after her lengthy voyage. She was at such an elevation that the slanting descent carried the craft to the very center of the town, the inhabitants flocking out by hundreds to see the wonderful sight.

Mr. Glassford so manipulated the aeroplanes that the *Comet* landed almost as gently as a feather. Then, in order that it might not take flight again when the passengers alighted, all the gas was let out of the bag. The motor ship's voyage was over for the time being.

"Where ye from, strangers?" cried a big man as he pushed his way through the throng that had gathered about the airship.

"From Park Haven, Indiana," replied Mr. Glassford. "Ours is one of the ships that took part in the race. Have you seen any others out this way?"

"Nary a one, stranger, and we don't want to see any more. It pretty nigh frightened all our people to death, and half the hosses in town bolted when ye come sailin' down from the sky."

"Where are we?" asked Mr. Glassford.

"Albemarle, Texas."

"What part of Texas?"

"Within two miles of the Rio Grande. You're not far from Mexico."

"Then we had a longer flight than I thought," said the inventor. "Come, boys, we must send some messages."

"Do you think it will be safe to leave the airship here?" asked Jerry.

"I think so. We will not be gone long."

"Ah, Santa Maria! The saints be praised! If it is not my very good friends the motor boys! And the little professor! Let me embrace them! It is a thousand years since I have seen them!"

A man, who had every appearance of being a Mexican, pushed his way through the throng. He was smoking a cigarette, but as he advanced he threw it away and held open his arms as if in welcome. The boys stared at him in some wonderment.

"Ah, do not say you have forgotten me!" cried the Mexican. "Do you not recall the terrible storm, and how you crashed into my houseboat?"

"It is Don Alvarzo!" cried Jerry.

"Ah! I knew they would not forget!" cried the man. "I am indeed Don Miguel Fernandez Alvarzo, your most devoted servant," and he took off his sombrero, heavy with silver braid, and made a low bow. "How are you all?" he asked.

"Is he a friend of yours?" asked Mr. Glassford in a low voice of Ned, for the man had hold of Jerry's two hands and was shaking them frantically.

"We met him when we made a trip through Mexico," said Ned as he recalled what had happened at the Don's house, as told in the third volume of this series, "The Motor Boys in Mexico."

The Mexican shook hands, in turn, with the other boys, the professor, and Mr. Glassford. He explained that he was now traveling about, buying wool, and in the course of his travels he had arrived at this Texas town.

"You must be my guests while you are here," he said, and he would not take no for an answer. He insisted on the aeronauts coming to the hotel where he was stopping, and thither they went, followed by a curious throng.

The boys sent telegrams to their parents, announcing their safe arrival, and Mr. Glassford wired to the secretary of the aero carnival, reporting how many miles they had covered, and how long they had been in the air.

"Now we'll wait for an answer," he said, "and see if we have won a prize."

"In the meanwhile, you must have some refreshment," declared the Don, and he insisted on an elaborate meal being served, to which he invited all the city officials, and made the boys, Mr. Glassford and Professor Snodgrass guests of honor.

In the midst of the banquet a boy brought in a telegram for Mr. Glassford. He read it quickly.

"Good news, boys!" he cried. "We win!"

"Do we get a prize?" asked Bob.

"Two of them," replied the inventor. "We win the long-distance prize, for we traveled two hundred and sixty-five miles farther than the big red balloon, and we were in the air four hours and a half longer!"

"Hurrah!" cried Ned. "That's the stuff!"

"Señors!" exclaimed Don Alvarzo, "I call for three American cheers for the brave travelers of the upper air!"

The cheers were given with a will.

A little later telegrams of congratulation were received from the boys' parents. One of the telegrams, from Mrs. Hopkins, stated that the pocketbook Jerry had dropped from the airship had been found by a farmer living near Broadlands, and he had returned the same with its contents, and claimed the reward.

"That's all right!" declared Jerry, highly pleased. "I was afraid I'd never hear of that money again."

The rest of the day was spent in an impromptu celebration, the whole town, in which lived many Mexican friends of the Don, joining in, glad of any excuse to have a holiday.

That night the airship was packed for transportation, and though the Don urged the travelers to make their visit longer, they departed for Cresville the next morning.

"Well, it was a success," said Jerry as they were rapidly steaming north. "I didn't think we would get both prizes. It more than pays us for the expenses we were under."

"Then we can take more trips," said Bob quickly. "We will try a longer flight next time."

"Oh, yes; I hope our adventures in the air have only just begun," added Ned.

The boys did have further adventures, as will be related in the next book of the series, to be entitled "The Motor Boys Across the Rockies; Or, A Mystery of the Air." In that story we shall meet all of our friends again in adventures even more thrilling than those encountered in the past. We shall also see what Noddy Nixon, who escaped from the hands of the law, did to injure them.

There was a great crowd at the Cresville depot waiting to welcome the motor boys and their friends, for Jerry had sent a telegram home, telling his mother when they would arrive, and the news spread.

"Hurrah! You're the stuff! Win two prizes! Shoot through the air! Never come down! I wish I had been there! Whoop-la!"

This was, of course, little Andy Rush.

"Let's form a procession!" he cried. "Come on, strike up the band!"

And sure enough, a small brass band, which the irrepressible youth had hired, began to play "See the Conquering Hero Comes!"

"March 'em through town!" went on Andy. "Here they are, girls!"

"Oh, weren't you dreadfully frightened?" cried Mollie Horton, who, with Alice Vines and Helen Gale, besides several other girls, had come down to the station to greet the boys.

"Not a bit!" cried Bob.

Then the band struck up another air, Andy ran to form the procession, taking his place at the head of it, and, though they did not exactly like it, the motor boys were forced to allow themselves to be thus honored.

The procession moved away from the depot and crossed the little square where the flagpole was set up.

"Speech! speech!" cried several as they caught sight of the band-stand. "Give us a speech about your trip."

"I'm not going to make any speech," murmured Jerry, who was rather bashful. Nor was Mr. Glassford accustomed to talking in public.

"Professor Snodgrass!" cried Andy.

"Certainly, I shall be delighted," replied the scientist. "Friends," he went on, stepping forward and making a low bow, "we had a most wonderful trip. High up among the clouds as we were, far above the earth, skimming along with the speed of the wind, free, unhampered, masters of the upper regions, there——"

"Hurrah!" cried the crowd.

"There, if I may be permitted to continue," went on the scientist, "I found more kinds of bugs than I ever imagined there were. It was a most delightful trip."

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the throng, half of the people not hearing what Mr. Snodgrass was saying.

But the scientist had said all he cared to. He bowed, the crowd cheered again, and Jerry whispered to his chums:

"Come on, let's get out of here. I've had enough."

They slipped from the platform, and before those who sought to honor them could interpose, the motor boys were hastening toward their homes, greatly pleased with their first trip in the clouds.

THE END

The Motor Girls Series

By Margaret Penrose

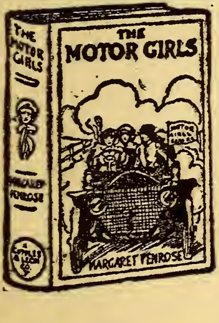
Author of the highly successful Dorothy Dale Series

Cloth. 12mo. Handsomely illustrated and beautifully bound in decorated cover, stamped in several colors. Price per volume, 60 cents, postpaid

---

THE MOTOR GIRLS

Or, A Mystery of the Road



WHEN Cora Kinball got her touring car she did not imagine so many adventures were in store for her. During a trip from one city to another a rich young man lost a pocketbook containing valuable stocks and much cash. Later, to the surprise of everybody, the empty pocketbook was found in the tool box of Cora's automobile. A fine tale that all wide-awake girls will appreciate.

THE MOTOR GIRLS ON A TOUR

Or, Keeping a Strange Promise

A GREAT many things happen in this volume, starting with the running over of a hamper of good things lying in the road. A precious heirloom is missing, and how it was traced up is told with absorbing interest. Mrs. Penrose's books are as safe as they are interesting and should be on the bookshelf of every girl in the land.

CUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers, NEW YORK

The Dorothy Dale Series

By Margaret Penrose

Cloth. 12mo. Illustrated. Price per volume, 60 cents, postpaid

DOROTHY DALE: A GIRL OF TO-DAY

DOROTHY is the daughter of an old Civil War veteran who is running a weekly newspaper in a small Eastern town. When her father falls sick, and the newspaper property is in danger of going to pieces, the girl shows what she can do to support the family.

DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL
DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL
MARGARET PENROSE
MARGARET PENROSE
CUPPLES & LEON CO

DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL

MORE prosperous times have come to the Dale family, and Major Dale resolves to send Dorothy to a boarding school to complete her education. At Glenwood School the girl makes a host of friends and has many good times. But some girls are jealous of Dorothy's popularity, and they seek to get her into trouble in more ways than one.

DOROTHY DALE'S GREAT SECRET

A SPLENDID story of one girl's devotion to another. Dorothy's chum ran away to join a theatrical company. What Dorothy did, and how she kept the secret, makes a tale no girl will care to miss.

DOROTHY DALE AND HER CHUMS

A STORY of school life, and of strange adventures among the gypsies. Dorothy befriends a little French girl and also a gypsy waif, in a manner sure to touch the hearts of all readers.

DOROTHY DALE'S QUEER HOLIDAYS

RELATES the details of a mystery that surrounded Tanglewood Park. There is a great snowstorm, and the young folks become snowbound, much to their dismay.

CUPPLES & LEON CO., Publishers, NEW YORK

32